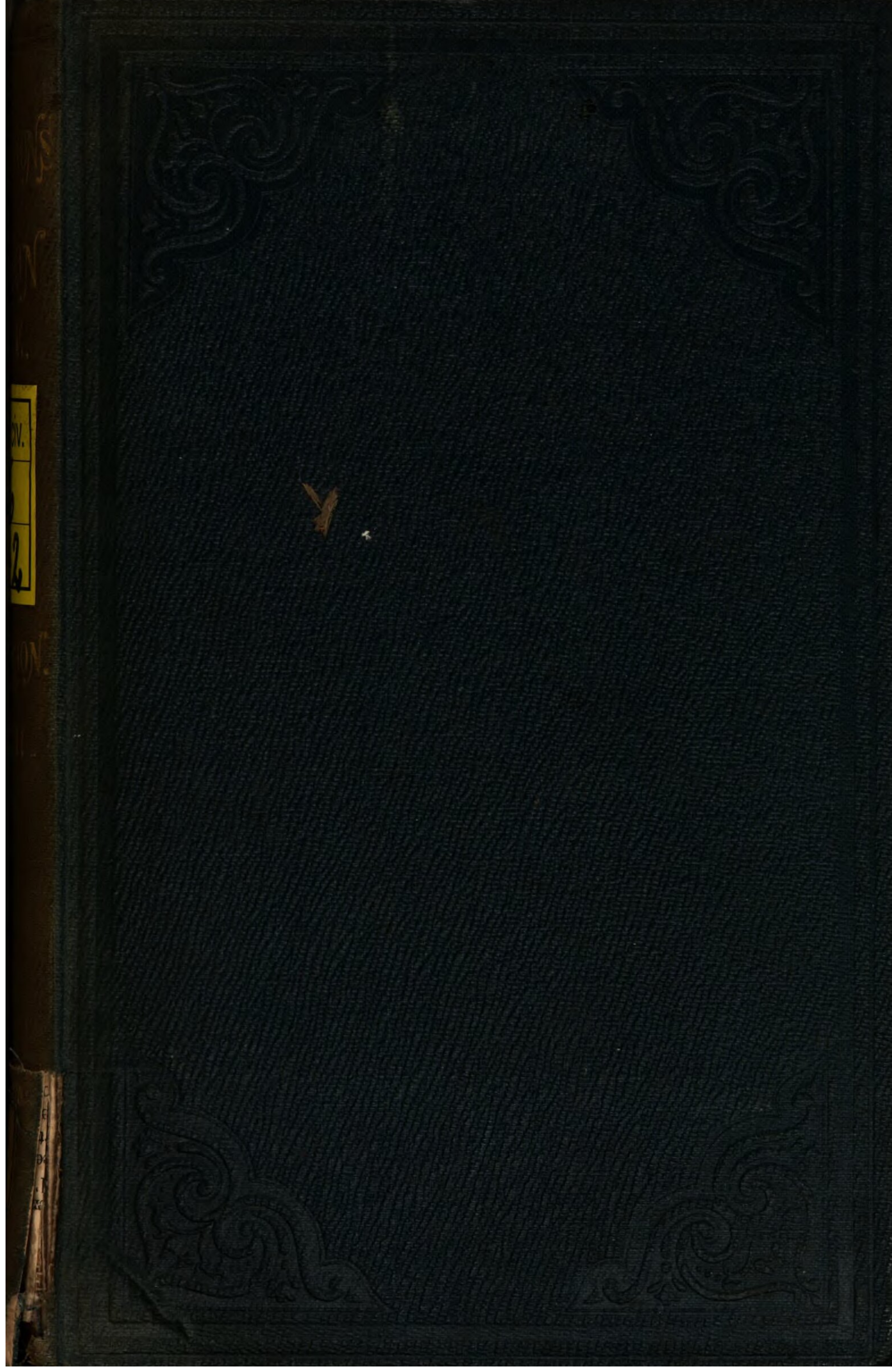






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REVELATIONS  
OF  
PRISON LIFE;

WITH AN ENQUIRY INTO

PRISON DISCIPLINE AND SECONDARY PUNISHMENTS.

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BY  
GEORGE LAVAL CHESTERTON.

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS GOVERNOR OF THE HOUSE OF CORRECTION,  
AT COLD BATH FIELDS.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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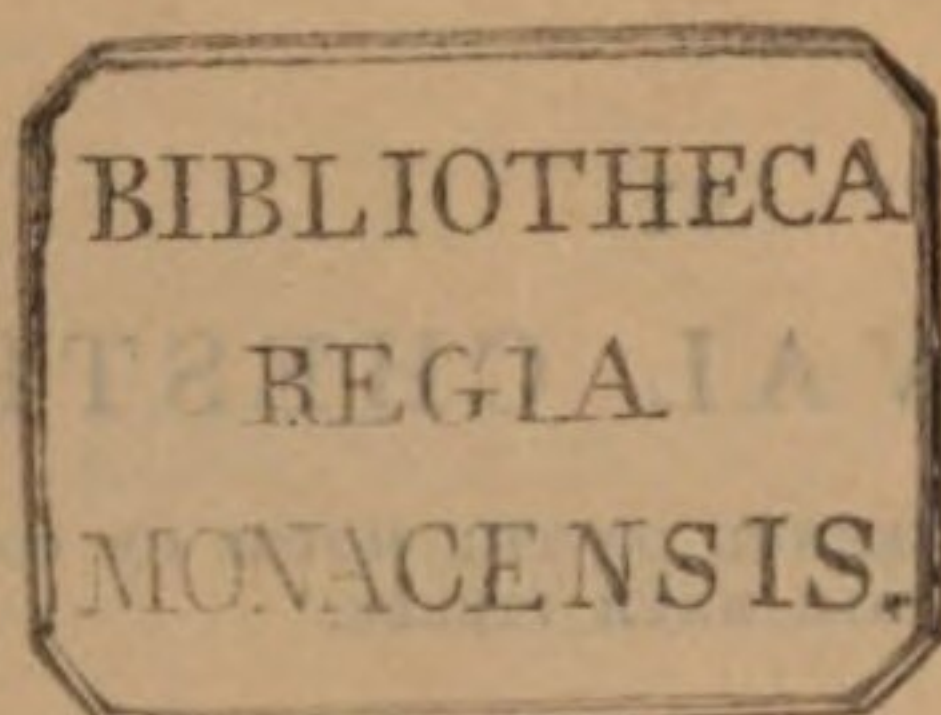


REVOLUTIONS

PRISON LIFE

WITH AN APOLOGY

PRISON DISCIPLINE AND SECONDARY PUNISHMENTS



IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. II

Second Edition, Revised

CHARLES BEVAN AND SON, PRINTERS, CHAPEL STREET, GROSVENOR SQUARE.

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1834



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# REVELATIONS OF PRISON LIFE.

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## CHAPTER I.

SYSTEMS OF PRISON DISCIPLINE—TRANSPORTATION  
IMPRACTICABLE—MR. CHARLES PEARSON'S PLAN.

DURING the extended period of twenty years, did I maintain, with unyielding strictness, the silent system in the prison of Cold Bath Fields, and I have solemnly recorded my opinion that, thus enforced, it is calculated to effect as much good as is derivable from any penal process. During that long period of time, not one single known infringement of the rule was overlooked. So great, indeed, was my disgust and horror at the unchecked intercourse of associated criminals, that I felt no compunction in enforcing



the rule of silence rigidly ; but, on the contrary, considered that I was fulfilling a solemn duty to society.

With a strong conviction in favour of the silent system, it may, perhaps, be surmised that I am about to insist that my favourite discipline is that which ought to be embraced by the whole kingdom. It has not failed to attract my observation, that whatever has been long administered by individuals is apt so to engross their partiality, as to blind them to any inherent defect easily discernible by others. This is the very weakness of which I complain in those who, having embraced a one-sided view, became intolerant against every other.

In order that I may set out in the discussion of this vital question, by conciliating confidence, and establishing some claims to candour and disinterestedness, I will at once avow that, highly as I value the silent system, patiently and sternly administered, I do not think it adapted to the prisons of the country at large, and especially under their present organization. In the first place, its efficacious enforcement demands so large a staff of officers, as positively to alarm economical administra-



tors ; whereas, without the materials for ample supervision under every possible contingency, the whole effort will prove abortive.<sup>1</sup> Secondly, even with the requisite staff of supervisors, the unswerving perseverance, and determination, indispensable in the chief administrator, are scarcely to be expected in a promiscuous body of governors selected from various dissimilar sources. Thirdly, not only must the chief officer prove prompt, decisive, and indefatigably zealous, but his deputy must also be of the same stamp, and the subordinates must continue to be weeded, until you are enabled to retain men who are at once patient, just, and vigilant, and who are capable of appreciating the public utility of their arduous task. That such men are to be found, has been demonstrated to my entire satisfaction.

The silent system, to be properly carried out, moreover requires a very extended space ;

<sup>1</sup> When the Duke of Richmond's act interdicted the employment of convicts, and the monitorial system was abolished, the magistrates of Middlesex, resolving to maintain their system, added 82 new officers, under the designation of "sub-warders," to the staff of the prison viz., 56 males, and 26 females.



an advantage which did not exist in Cold Bath Fields, and which is to be found, in a still less degree, in provincial prisons generally. Wherever we failed in Middlesex, it was owing to want of space. In a prison originally built for 232 persons, and by enlargement made gradually to accommodate 450 more, but which at length inclosed 1596 souls, we must manifestly have had to struggle against every imaginable difficulty.<sup>1</sup> Still we persevered, and met with eminent success, notwithstanding

<sup>1</sup> The late Mr. Whiskin, a magistrate well acquainted with all the details of building, devoted much time to the enlargement and improvement of the prison. Every nook and corner in which a new cell could be raised was made available. Mr. Turner, also a magistrate, and a wrangler of Cambridge University, followed in the same track, and was even still more successful. By the labour of prisoners large dormitories, each capable of containing 100 beds, were erected, which were lighted and watched during the night each by two warders. By such useful inventions the establishment was greatly enlarged; but it was still inadequate to the calls for accommodation, and, from necessity, the very workshops were at the end of the day cleared, and diverted to temporary sleeping accommodation.



the serious odds against us. It shows what indomitable resolution may accomplish ; but it is hardly calculable that similar impediments should be steadily confronted, and, by untiring patience, be universally overcome.

In Boston, U. S. (as I was informed by the late secretary of the Prison Discipline Society), their buildings, grounds, and work-rooms, displayed the desired capacity, and thus prisoners were enabled to walk, sit, and work at a safe distance from their fellows. With such advantages, infractions of the rule became rare, because nearly impossible, and thus punishments were avoided.

Looking, therefore, at the general character of prison buildings in this country, their antique, contracted, and irregular form and extent, together with the lack of requisite qualities in most governors, and the unwise parsimony of many local authorities (who, with a view to save a few pounds, sacrifice the substantial interests of society), I am convinced that the silent system is not one that recommends itself to universal adoption in Great Britain.



The home inspectors, Messrs. Russell and Crawford, were advocates for the general demolition of existing structures, and the erection of the new order of buildings. These latter, in their design, are the best hitherto invented, but they were then most costly, and are still only to be reared at a very great expense. Many buildings are susceptible of modification and extension, and might thus be adapted to whatever system should chance to be preferred, without incurring an enormous outlay. Moreover, society is progressive, and it does not follow that any one mode should for ever maintain its superiority, even if that should be conceded.

Already has another plan been propounded with a view to meet the general exigencies of the state, since transportation has become no longer available. The plan of Mr. Charles Pearson, which was thoroughly sifted, in the session of 1850, by the committee of the House of Commons, of which Mr. E. Denison was chairman, is worthy of the most attentive consideration. As a measure of universal application, it appears to me to suit the entire



subject, and would relieve the government from all the difficulties which arise from the adoption of different modes, and temporary expedients.

A thousand acres for a thousand prisoners constitutes the main feature of the design, and with such an area Mr. Pearson proved, step by step, the practicability of furnishing all that the entire establishment would require to consume, defray the totality of the expense, and yield a good profit to the state. I was examined at great length to show how the discipline might in such circumstances be maintained; and there was not a proposition in the scheme which was not sustained by the testimony of competent witnesses. Nor did it exhibit any niggardly spirit in the allotment of officers. The proposed staff was ample; and, in deducing results, every part of the estimate appeared to be computed on a liberal scale, so as to guard against ulterior disappointment. I know, by the personal avowal of members of that committee, how much respect the plan of Mr. Pearson elicited. The main objections to it—sufficiently formidable, doubtless—are the



## 8 NECESSITY OF CENTRALIZED AUTHORITY.

necessary abruption of existing jurisdictions, the entire demolition of most, if not all, existing structures, and the indispensable centralization of authority.

This last obligation would doubtless awaken popular jealousy ; and Mr. Pearson must be prepared to battle with innumerable opponents, and to advance sound reasons in support of so grave an innovation. For my own part, I have long descried the infinite mischief arising from the dissimilar treatment of criminals, according to the partial views, the parsimonious spirit, or the utter indifference of divided authorities. A centralized authority becomes, in my mind, a matter of crying exigency. ' Self-government ' may fitly apply to whatever appertains to the health of the locality, the sustenance of the poor, and the conveniences of a district ; but in the abridgment of liberty, in penal coercion, and in the exercise of power over the minutest action and word of an hitherto free subject, nothing should be left to caprice, or partial and conflicting views. One universal code should extend to all, and one undivided authority be



held responsible to the nation, that every convicted criminal—no matter of whatever county or borough—should, really, for the same offence, be visited with the same treatment which the law has apportioned to the same crime.

As the case at present stands, and as it always must be found under various jurisdictions, independent of each other, there will exist the widest diversity in the condition of prisoners ; and every one, familiar with the subject, knows that numerous gaols differ in all essential particulars from others ; while, in most provincial prisons, in order to reduce the expenditure to a minimum amount, the substantial interests of the district, and of society at large, have been, and most likely still are, compromised. Mr. Pearson's plan recommends itself to the sound sense of the nation ; and the justices of the peace, who crowd the House of Commons, must be prepared to evince their patriotism and disinterestedness, by the voluntary surrender or abridgment of their own power.

I cannot conceive anything more signally



inhuman than the separate system as long pursued at the Eastern Penitentiary in Philadelphia, and yet, notwithstanding its fatal severity, such men as the late Mr. Crawford, could blindly be led to recommend it as exhibiting reformatory perfectability. Knowing, as I so well know, how far human endurance can extend, I could weep over the protracted sufferings of the miserable beings exposed to such refined torture. 'The opportunity for reflection' was the ignorant plea by which the votaries of separation sought to sanctify their inflictions. In those days, there was no assemblage in chapel, no joint instruction in schools (processes which at Pentonville sensibly relieved the corroding tedium of solitude) nought but consuming isolation, rarely assuaged by occasional samaritan visits.

That the engaging aspect of the buildings, the unbroken quietude prevailing, and the subdued demeanour and copious tears of the inmates, should lead captive the minds of philosophical inquirers, is, to me, a subject of deep wonderment; but that it should evoke the admiration and enthusiasm of Christian



hearts, is matter of still graver astonishment.

At page 13 of the Third Report, we read—  
“Under the separate system, an appeal is made to the moral sense and understanding of the prisoner; he is treated as a man, and with respect and benevolence due to humanity;” and the more forcibly to attest this boasted, but suspicious mercy, we find at page 36, “that the experience of nine years in the penitentiary at Philadelphia has shown that, where the cell is sufficiently large, and well ventilated, exercise in the open air is *not requisite*.”

Now, turn from the former declaration, and combine with it the significant commentary of the latter, and then observe the pitiable exhibition which the ensuing extract presents. It is copied from a swollen list, to be found between pages 127 and 136, and there you contemplate a shocking illustration of distorted ‘humanity and benevolence.’ From the registry of *hundreds* of human beings immured within that temple of sighs (carefully excluding all convicted of murder), we behold



## 12 EFFECTS OF THE SEPARATE SYSTEM.

the terms of seclusion the following individuals, designated by numbers, were fated to undergo :—

|     |     |       |                     |
|-----|-----|-------|---------------------|
| No. | 3   | ..... | 11 years            |
|     | 30  | ..... | 10 „                |
|     | 31  | ..... | 10 „                |
|     | 50  | ..... | 7 „                 |
|     | 56  | ..... | 10 „                |
|     | 58  | ..... | 12 „                |
|     | 359 | ..... | 10 „                |
|     | 360 | ..... | 10 „                |
|     | 529 | ..... | 13 „ and one month. |

In vain may the vindicators of this cruel resort point to the numerous, but trifling punishments involved in the maintenance of the silent system. To my mind, this painful close incarceration for years partakes of the character of lingering torture, with which no summary discipline can compare. At page 89, it is affirmed of the repentant culprit, “his cell has appeared to lose its horrors.” I marvel much that such enraptured pens should have hazarded the use of that descriptive word. How true that assertion was, will appear from the answers of prisoners themselves



to the interrogatories of Messrs. De Beaumont and De Tocqueville, which are cited in various parts of the report, with a view to display the benefits of the separate system. At page 24, we read of No. 41, a young man who professes that religion is the "greatest consolation."

Q.—"Do you find it difficult to endure solitude?"

A.—"Ah! sir, it is the most horrid punishment that can be imagined."

Q.—"Does your health suffer from it?"

A.—"No; but my soul is very sick."

Of No. 61, it is said, "the Bible is his greatest consolation;" and then we read, "he cannot speak long without being agitated and shedding tears. We have made the same remark of *all* whom we have seen." No. 46 says, "solitude seems to him a punishment extremely hard;" while No. 61 declares "nobody can imagine the horrid punishment of continued solitude."

Now, will anyone, who is acquainted with the impulses of the human mind, really believe that where persons disclose their feelings by the superlative terms of "most horrid punish-



ment, "my soul is very sick," and where they are so tremblingly agitated as to burst into tears, which is affirmed to be the case with *all*—doubtless from the enervating effects of solitude—can such persons really deem the process a humane one, or in their hearts conceive that they are treated "with the respect and benevolence due to humanity?" Impossible!

The admirers of the system vaunt the religious impressions manifested under it, failing to perceive that mental depression, sympathetically derived from physical prostration, may extort tears from the eyes, and induce faintness of heart, and disquietude of soul. The subduing monotony of their lives, and the occasional exhortation of their visitors (all of whom deemed it necessary to reiterate the subject of repentance) agitate the mind, and invoke the streams of sorrow, while the serious but unreasoning observer hails the effect of bodily weakness as in reality the sign of conversion, and the promise of future amendment. Thus a condition, which, under other circumstances, would kindle reproaches, becomes divested of harshness, and clothed with the attributes of mercy.



To the really practical man, and less visionary reasoner, however, the long list of wretched creatures, subject to that direful torture, speaks trumpet-tongued against the affectation of humanity in so revolting a form, and should serve as a warning to future philanthropists, to mistrust the extorted semblance of righteousness, on the one hand, and the *doctrinaire* sentimentality, of well-meaning, but weak men, on the other.

Be it remembered that from the source now examined did the system, wending its silent march through this land, with all its exaggerated anticipations, spring; that Philadelphia will most likely be often referred to to attest an efficacy purely imaginable. It is, consequently, conferring a public benefit on society to expose the weakness of its tendency as regards reformation, and its fatal inroads upon health and life.

At that period it produced in Philadelphia undue mortality, avowedly four per cent.; and so unconscious were those inspectors of this monstrous per centage, that, at page 65, they actually lauded the salubrity of the Philadelphian establishment.



In the corresponding year, at Cold Bath Fields, under the extraordinary pressure of a fatal epidemic in the metropolis, which inordinately increased the mortality—with a daily average of 976 inmates, the deaths amounted to 42. Now if that prison had suffered in the ratio of the Eastern Penitentiary, at Philadelphia, the deaths would have exceeded 350.

Moreover, in Philadelphia cases of *dementia*, an aggravated form of insanity, were constantly occurring. The report, at that time, of a special committee of the Parliament of Lower Canada, appended to the Boston Report, at page 178, thus affirmed—"Cases of mental alienation have also been so frequent in the Philadelphian Penitentiary, that your committee must consider them to be the fatal result of constant isolation." Coupled with this branch of the subject, let me again refer to the condition of the first batch of prisoners transferred to the Millbank prison, from Pentonville, after only eighteen months' separation, with assuagements unknown at Philadelphia; and the danger, at all times, of unnatural seclusion becomes indisputable.



Dr. Johnson has affirmed that 'solitude is dangerous to reason, without being favourable to virtue;' and the example of Philadelphia, while it established the first truism, equally illustrated the second. This I shall proceed to show.

On the authority of the inspectors, the success of their system was not only unfailing, but universal. So early in their lucubrations as at the 8th page, they aver as follows—  
 "The convict, upon his enlargement, will look back upon his prison as a place in which he has been treated with salutary strictness, and will resume his station in society with feelings of gratitude for moral benefits, for which he will consider the rectitude of his future life to be but a very inadequate requital." At page 91, they ask triumphantly—"Is it nothing to have converted an idle vagabond, who has hitherto lived by plunder and fraud, into a useful, industrious, and honest man?" They had previously asserted that "the separate system, as exemplified in the Eastern Penitentiary at Philadelphia, is productive of *all* the benefits which the most earnest and



sanguine advocates of prison discipline have ever ventured to hope for." Affirmations to this effect, of the most positive kind, abound.

Well, all this inflated pretension is disprovable. First, however, let us glance at the long, lingering, wasting solitude—the protracted interment, as it were, of those consigned to that Eastern Penitentiary—to contemplate an example not to be exceeded in severity; and, secondly, let us survey the almost illimitable territory of the United States, and (in that bygone time especially) the comparative paucity of the population, and the ready means, not only of gaining a livelihood, but of acquiring a local habitation and a name. Having taken this practical view of the hopeful, nay, inevitable, success of every honest and industrious effort, we can readily perceive how different must be the condition of the emancipated criminal in America from the same being in Europe generally, and in England in particular.

If, therefore, the inspectors' position were sound, and the reforming influence of their system undoubted, we should, *à fortiori*, con-



clude that no man, once enlarged, would, after such an example—or need, for lack of resources—re-enter that penitentiary. The efficacy of the system is now reduced to a very simple test. Well, up to the period of which I am treating, no fewer than 41 persons have returned to the Eastern Penitentiary in seven years, and as many as ‘nineteen’ within the year preceding the publication of the report, to say nothing of those who most probably visited the prisons of other States. Consequently, these returns to the Eastern Penitentiary, and the ratio of annual re-commitments to the separate prison of Glasgow, amounting to 50 per cent., conclusively demonstrate the fallacy of assigning to the separate system the regenerative character which is so vain-gloriously claimed for it.

In connection with this species of discipline much stress has been laid upon the dangers of recognition, and it is an accompaniment of the system in England to furnish the prisoners with masks to conceal their features as they move daily to chapel or to school. Those who are attentive observers have not failed to



remark, in separate prisons, how irksome these disguises appear to be to the prisoners, and how habitually careless they are in wearing them effectively. It is averred that acquaintanceship may be formed by the frequent sight of each other, after-recognition become inevitable, and the safe return to honest occupations be frustrated.

Now, here again we have cause to remark conclusions drawn without due reasoning, for it rarely happens than any one (of whose after-return to a correct course there is any just expectation) can commit an offence which will consign him to a prison, without the fact becoming widely circulated amongst his friends and acquaintances. Every man with any sort of connexions is surrounded by interests or objects—humble though he be—which he cannot hastily forsake with impunity. Should he be suddenly absent, inquiries will pursue him, and change of name, or any other device or ingenuity, is seldom successful in eluding this doubtless affectionate vigilance of friends.

In almost every instance, therefore, the facts become known, the position of the party



transpires, and the proverbial industry of rumour sends the tidings throughout the circle of both friends and enemies; and, from the latter, increased currency of the news is to be apprehended. The chief injury which such a man is likely to sustain from recognition, is, therefore, from the very nature of things, already inflicted, and the after-recognition of a fellow-prisoner falls comparatively harmless upon him.

In provincial towns and rural districts, it is manifest that the cause of absence, and the destination and return of any individual, must inevitably become notorious throughout his neighbourhood. There, the possibility of concealment scarcely exists, and, consequently, no subsequent promulgation of the event would attach increased discredit to the man. The notion of this appalling danger from recognition is—equally with other parts of the report—unduly magnified, and affords no just grounds for inordinate apprehension.

Moreover, so long as every process of law in criminal cases is conducted in the face of the public (and it must always be so, if the



administration of justice is to remain pure and unsuspected), there will always be an exposure of the delinquent, which must immensely increase the liability to disclose his condition to the world. Where a prison garb is provided (as it should be in the case of all convicted prisoners), the resumption of his own dress so metamorphoses the individual, as to render the recognition of those who have only seen him in the gaol attire no very easy matter. Here, therefore, protection—if it be needed—is to a great extent to be found; but I am sure the point is quite exaggerated, and the clamour which it has excited is quite as groundless as other parts of the report are redundant in vain predictions of miraculous amendment.

The condemnation of the silent system was principally based upon its implied imperfection, its easy practical infringement by the watchful cunning of artful thieves, and the great number of punishments involved in its enforcement. I think I have pretty clearly established the fact, that, even under close separation, communications extensively prevailed. In the present day—with all the indispensable



modifications of the original design—I have been made fully acquainted with the facility of defeating the intentions of its patrons. But, to revert to the silent system: in this country it has never yet been attempted with the space necessary to its perfect development. Secondly, no doubt, professional thieves have a freemasonry of their own, and have numberless significant signs comprehensible to each other, which impart no intelligence to any but their own craft. Overt, distinguishable signs were forbidden, and, when detected, punished. The comforting reflection was, that they themselves could only thus communicate to a very limited extent, and that even unlimited communication (were it possible) could not further corrupt them, while the uninitiated were ignorant of the import of their signs, and safe from contaminating influence.

As regards punishments, they averaged daily a fraction above three per cent. Consequently, 97 persons out of every hundred, while they realized protection, remained unharmed throughout the day. Multitudes of boys and lads were coerced into silence, and



the Home Inspectors dilated upon the occasional stoppage of half a meal, with the acrimony due to inquisitorial torture. They quite lost sight of the discipline to which such youthful subjects would be liable in their humble homes. How many of them would be cuffed on the ear; put in the corner, and sent supperless to bed; lose the periodical half-penny; be restricted from play; deterred from a promised walk or visit; deprived of a Sunday suit; or suffer by some of the other various means employed by humble parents for the control or management of their children? Who would raise an outcry against the turpitude of such inflictions?

I shall not soon forget the sensation created in the Committee of the House of Commons (Mr. E. Denison, chairman) at the answer I gave to a question relating to these punishments; nor how instantaneously my explanation elicited the approving ejaculations of most of the members. Mr. Alderman Sidney—then M.P. for Stafford—was a great advocate for separation, and after having heard my testimony in favour of the other system, he



asked me if I did not think the great number of punishments necessary to its maintenance constituted a serious evil. I replied that, on the contrary, I regarded them as signally beneficial. The utmost surprise was manifested by the whole committee, every one of whom seemed to be electrified with astonishment. With an earnest countenance, the chairman begged I would explain how I could possibly discover benefit in punishment. My explanation was to the following effect :—

We have the custody of persons who have never experienced any sort of parental control, and who have, in point of fact, become tyrants over their parents, and over their neighbours, and have ultimately carried their unruly tempers into a conflict with every portion of society accessible to them. At length, convicted and imprisoned, they bring with them, and are not slow to exhibit, every species of wilfulness ; and, in accordance with their usual habit, they resist and defy all control. But they are now under very different circumstances ; the strong arm of authority visits every outbreak of turbulence, and every



recurring manifestation of obstinacy and disobedience with punishment. In proportion to their efforts at resistance, is coercion reiterated, until the malignants begin to perceive how unequal is the contest, and how severely they suffer by its continuance. Thus forced into reflection, for the first time in their lives, they become penitent and submissive. The lesson is not lost upon them ; and, in process of time, their dispositions are so obviously improved as to attest the invaluable benefit of the treatment they had received, while the reforming efficacy of punishment has thus become indisputably established.

In separate confinement, the only practical lesson is that of patient endurance. There is nothing analogous to the hourly collision with the social world. Man is required to cultivate virtues which shall stand the test of 'tribulation,' and the word implies something more than patience under the gloom of solitude. In vain may the prisoners become imbued with a shallow devotion, and pronounce the study of the Bible a pleasure. It may be, that he seizes upon those resources, because none others are



available. The forty and upwards who returned to the Philadelphia Penitentiary, had doubtless in their time of seclusion professed the same religious fervour, since Messrs. De Beaumont and De Tocqueville found it to be the distinguishing mark of *all*. Those ebullitions of piety, resulting, in most cases, from morbid sensibility, vanished on the first serious trial of their vitality.

In the selection of a system of prison discipline, you have only a choice of evils. The silent system produces to a great extent, a constrained and artificial existence, but then, it is a nearer approach to the natural state designed for man, and at least exposes him to a healthful contest with external things. Moreover, it inflicts no injury upon the health. However protracted the sentence, health is sustained, in the ordinary ratio of mankind, to the last. The legitimate opportunities, nay, the demands for the use of speech are numerous. The daily responses in chapel, communications with the governor, the chaplain, the schoolmaster, and various officers, all tend healthfully to employ the tongue. It is only intercommunication



between prisoner and prisoner that is interdicted. It is also a favourable feature in the system that all the better disposed prisoners applaud it. They witness the peacefulness it secures, and the protection it affords, and they rejoice in both.

The harmful tedium of solitude is, on the contrary, equally unhealthy and pernicious. It is frightfully depressing. All whom I have seen exposed to its lengthened ravages have lost weight and condition fearfully, but I never witnessed its powerful effects more strongly exhibited than in the following case.

John Bishop, the monster who was executed for the cruel murder of the Italian boy, 'burked' in order to secure the price of his body in the school of anatomy, was, without exception, the most finished ruffian within my memory. He was a man of powerful frame, of repulsive countenance, and of brutal address and manners. Consigned to my charge, on remand, and with the direction to be 'kept apart' (an occasional custom in those days), he entered the prison uttering oaths and execrations, indulged in the grossest language,



and assailed the subordinates, and even myself, with menace and defiance. He had received no provocation, but gave vent to the irrepressible brutality of his nature. Fourteen days of exclusive self-communing incarceration produced in this abandoned criminal a change so marked and depressing, as to constitute an instructive commentary upon the wear and tear which unrelieved reflection will produce upon a guilty mind. Bishop was, by law, entitled to supply himself with a generous diet, and he was permitted to take daily exercise in the open air, and to have an ample supply of books ; so that feebleness could not have been induced by diminished sustenance, nor be referable to aught but the terror resulting from solitary ruminations. Certain it is, that iron-souled miscreant became so meek and subdued, so prone to tears, so tremulous, and agitated, that at the end of fourteen days, when he was again sent up to the police-office, he could hardly be recognized as the same coarse and blustering bully who had so recently entered the prison. It was impossible to see the effects of solitude upon a conscience



stricken by crime more signally exemplified. When committed to Newgate, I found, on inquiry, that a renewed association with lawless men had revived the brutality so inseparable from his nature.

It may be contended that Bishop's was an extreme example of guilt, and that the apparition of his misdeeds was likely to terrify and alarm to an extraordinary degree. Be it so : but if fourteen days only could produce this soul-subduing change, what might not be expected from the ravages of lingering months, upon men whose dire misdeeds would start up to affright and overwhelm them.

Amongst criminals, whose offences—grave enough, perhaps—against the well-being of society are not dark enough greatly to afflict their consciences, it is a fallacy to suppose that 'the opportunity for reflection' (the boast of the separate system) will be embraced in the desired form. The reminiscence of bygone delights, of demoralizing associations and pleasures, is far more frequently conjured up to gratify the mind, and wile away the hours. This may be inferred from the following examples out of many I could adduce.



When Mr. Wood, the warden of the Penitentiary at Philadelphia, visited this country a very few years ago, he failed not to inspect the metropolitan prisons, and, consequently, passed through those of Clerkenwell. In the course of conversation, he related the ensuing instructive incident. A man who had undergone *six years'* separate confinement in the Eastern Penitentiary, unexpectedly received a remission of his further sentence. He had held out in point of health tolerably well, and, when summoned to the warden's office, received the welcome intelligence of his unlooked-for liberation. He sat down for an instant, appeared to be seized with a momentary abstraction, and suddenly looking up, inquired "Is it really the fact, Mr. Wood, that I am now free?" Being answered in the affirmative, he proceeded thus—"would you do me a favour, sir?" An assent being given, he continued, "I think, when I arrived here six years ago, I brought two-pence with me." The proper book having been consulted, the sum named was found duly registered. Upon which he said, "would you allow somebody to step out



and get me a bit of tobacco?" The request was complied with, and Mr. Wood affirmed that he began to chew and spit as though he had never relinquished the habit. If, therefore, this dirty custom had not been cured by six years' of abstinence, is it not reasonable to suppose that more mischievous vices had occupied his mind in an equal proportion, and that his reflections had tended towards other material gratifications?

Whenever, in Cold Bath Fields, we intercepted surreptitious correspondence amongst criminals, however long their confinement might have been, in the great majority of cases we discovered a reference to past misdoings, and a promise thereafter to renew them. Much cunning contrivance was exhibited in those attempts at communication. A small bit of stick, and an atom of coal, would constitute the former a pen, and the latter, crumbled and mixed with saliva, the ink. In default of other material, a slight incision in the arm, and the expression of their own blood would serve the purpose of ink. That was a plan frequently resorted to, but all such schemes were confined to the class of incorrigible thieves.



Well, a young man of very feeble constitution, doubtless rendered yet more fragile by excess, was imprisoned for uttering base coin, and had already undergone some months' imprisonment. He was known to his 'pals' by the *sobriquet* of 'Jack the Lagger'—*i. e.*, one who has been transported—and he clandestinely attempted to communicate with his loose acquaintances, who held their rendezvous in Westminster. His letter, written on a detached leaf of his prayer-book, was, however, intercepted. Here was a man of such failing strength that he ultimately died in the prison, debarred from illicit conversation, and sleeping in a separate cell: just the very subject whose secret reflections, it might be presumed, would be sagely employed. On the contrary, he turned his thoughts to the orgies of his criminal friends, sighed to be in the midst of them, commended himself to their remembrance, and subscribed himself 'Poor Jack the Lagger,' adding also the following postscript:—"Now, I writes this upon my little bed: best of times is bed."

There was usually an effort to send out such



missives by stealthily passing them to some known individuals who had but little time to remain in confinement. After assuming their own clothes, all prisoners about to be discharged were minutely searched; but the utmost scrutiny could not always avail against the wiles of our artful disciples.

In another case, a young thief, aged about twenty-two years, who had already passed six out of a sentence of fifteen months' incarceration, essayed to correspond with his associate in the robbery of which both were convicted. Detection followed the attempt, and we read sentiments, traced in his own blood, remarkable for unflinching hardihood. He exhorted his pal to keep up his spirits, and that advice was couched in the flash language of "hold up your pecker." He anticipated that they should yet 'work' (a very expressive thief's term) together, and avowed his intention not thenceforth to stick at trifles or to work for nothing; "he would try for something worth having next time."

Now, these are specimens of the practical reflection so much extolled; and, alas! I could



multiply them *ad infinitum*. If, however, it be contended that these examples occur principally under the silent system, I would ask the replicant, if he chanced to be present at the several public meetings in the city of London, convened by Mr. Charles Pearson ; and, if so, whether he had previously witnessed a more complete exposure of false pretensions than that which denuded the reformatory enthusiasts of Reading Gaol of all the theoretic perfectability of their vaunted separation. The test of inquiry and examination had so efficaciously revealed the solemn farce which had been so pompously enacted, that, had it not been for the weighty consideration of the imperilled interests of the kingdom, jeopardized by the childish absurdities practised in that gaol, it must have elicited bursts of contemptuous laughter.

I never can cease to recall the irrepressible derision with which I, and other practical men, listened to the inconceivable extravagance of resolving the sentence of 'hard labour' into the exhausting daily effort, assigned to adult convicts, of copying a given number of



scriptural passages ! And yet, we beheld a pious divine, and a few excited Berkshire magistrates ready to denounce, as heterodox, the opinion of whomsoever dared to question their sublime exposition of legal *duresse*. Oh ! for a centralized authority to restrain such an abuse of law and common sense !



## CHAPTER II.

### PRACTICAL REFLECTIONS—RELIABLE EXPECTATIONS.

IN the course of my protracted experience, I have not failed to be strongly impressed with the singular dissatisfaction with which the public mind has marked the efforts to effect prison reform. Notwithstanding that the prisons of Middlesex, and some other county establishments, had emerged from the slough of abomination, and been elevated into seats of discipline, industry, and progressive morality—and that, since the Duke of Richmond's exertions, most of the prisons of the country had entirely changed their form, and some had become distinguished for enlightened



management—notwithstanding all the expense incurred, the pains bestowed, and the partial success developed—the public has not been a whit more satisfied than it appeared to have been upwards of twenty years ago. Then, the cry was first raised, and, in sooth, now still continues to be heard—“Something must be done!” There is no paucity of theorists who propound their own infallible panaceas, but the great bulk of mankind appear as wide of the mark as ever.

To me, this ceaseless tone of discontent has proved a great discouragement; and, on a retrospect of the past, and contemplation of the present, I cannot forbear to inquire, “How is this?” And here I should like my words, fortified as they are by twenty-five and a half years’ experience in the largest prison of the kingdom, to be heard, and weighed by those who seek the practical solution of a momentous problem.

I think I have some right, without presumption, to class myself amongst the best informed upon this weighty question. I have closely watched and pondered over the working of my



own vast charge, and have industriously culled all the practical information derivable from the reports of the most noted home and foreign establishments; but to whatever point I have turned my eyes, I have inevitably beheld the same results. I have noted a vast amount of humane hopefulness, but at variance with all practical discrimination.

I say, then, that the public has been misled upon the subject of prison reform by the empirical pretensions of visionary minds; that the eventualities prognosticated have been delusive, and without due regard to facts and probabilities; that the prospect of unerring results, held out by the ultra zeal of separatists, is a mere phantom of the brain, has never been realized, and is never likely to be; that to affirm, as was affirmed in the third report of the home inspectors, that separation would *inevitably* convert "an idle vagabond, who has hitherto lived by plunder and fraud, into a useful, industrious, and honest man," is a culpable deception, and contrary to all the tests hitherto applied to a grave practical question; that no system whatever, no care of the crimi-



nal, and no instruction—however unweariedly bestowed—will produce those desirable results; and that such promises are exaggerated and deceptive. My experience has shown me that a large class of convicts are (with the rarest exceptions) utterly hopeless; that he who embraces thievery as a *craft*, receives the deepest imaginable taint from the flagitious vices in which the professional thief indulges; that it unfits him for quiet, persevering industry, for monotonous toil and domestic sobriety; and imbues his mind with an unextinguishable taste for riot, lasciviousness, and intemperance; that, notwithstanding the benignant reflections of the pious and merciful, who cling to the hope that no man can be accounted utterly lost, the sad realities which I have contemplated compel me to aver that at least nine-tenths of habitual depredators have no desire or intention to forsake their guilty courses. They love the vices in which they have revelled, and pertinaciously resolve to adhere to them. The recent exposure of the ticket-of-leave class goes far to confirm that fact. I have never felt the least surprise at a



relapse into crime, which has so scandalized the public, since my knowledge of London thieves led me to anticipate nothing else.

Even in the case of the best disposed amongst this corrupt multitude, where, let me ask, is the discarded herd to go? Will they rush, with slender temporary means, into some unknown locality, and seek to interest strangers in their behalf? If so, what would be the probable success? Are there many persons, of whatever order, who would have the courage stoically to shun their relatives and friends, of whose cordial reception they are secure, and experimentalize upon the sympathies of alien hearts? Assuredly not! The conclusion, therefore, is *inevitable*, that the discharged convict will fly to his accustomed haunts, and the most superficial knowledge of those polluted localities will determine the question, as to how long his recent appreciation of wholesome counsel and pastoral instruction may be expected to survive!

The very last time I conversed with the late honoured Mrs. Fry upon this subject, when sickness was leaving sad traces in her



countenance, she besought me, with unwonted earnestness, to lose no opportunity of impressing upon those in authority, the necessity for improving the habitations of the poor in London, and in populous towns. She remarked how vain it was to expect happy results from the utmost pains bestowed upon the teaching of criminals in prison, when they were to be again consigned to the hateful neighbourhoods with which her active charity had brought her so well acquainted.

Those who profess, and continually vaunt, the efficacy of redeeming grace, will insist that the spirit of God is all-powerful to recall such sinners from their ways, and that nothing else will accomplish the object. It would be the height of impiety to question for one moment the power of the Almighty to effect whatever may seem good in His sight ; and I am, therefore, forced into the conclusion—after all I have witnessed—that it is not His good pleasure thus, by supernatural invocation, to free these beings from their guilty inclinations. He leaves them to their own devices, and they obstinately persist in crime, until it finally enslaves and overwhelms them.



With respect to the hopeful portion of the convicted, it has appeared to me indubitable that the shame of detection and exposure, the anguish inflicted upon respectable relations, the scorn of casual friends, and all the accompaniments of loss of position, moral prostration, and disgrace, tend so to torture and oppress their minds, that, in all likelihood, a sudden release from penal visitation would not leave them without a solemn resolution to avoid all such future snares. Here I allude to clerks, shopmen and women, domestic servants heretofore of good character, the improvident children of reputable parents, and those few who may have moved in good society. I am simply reasoning upon the probabilities of sincere repentance, and am far from insisting that such persons, however hopeful, should become exempt from the consequences of their actions. Doubtless the lengthened sentences many of them receive are due equally to public justice and to salutary example.

Even the hopefulness of the better classes will depend upon the duration, and special character of their delinquencies. I renounce



all confidence in the drunkard, I greatly mistrust the gamester class ; while those who have *long* neglected their legitimate occupations for the general revels of the tavern, the attractions of theatres, and places of the lowest resort are very apt, ere long, to disregard warning, and to relapse into crime. Those clever rogues who figure as swindlers, or who live by deliberate fraud—such as horse-chaunters, fictitious bill discounters, and mock-auction cheats—are persons naturally heartless and unprincipled, whose consciences are so seared as to be rarely assailable. Nor did I ever yet hear of a begging-letter impostor who abandoned his vocation.

Thus, public expectation having been very highly excited by theorists and declaimers, it has continually suffered disappointment, simply because too much success has been predicted, while in fact the corruption instilled into youthful minds, and the long pursuit of enticing gratifications in maturer years, are rarely to be corrected by compulsory observances. The question then arises—“What is to be done, and on what are we to found the hopes of favourable results ?”



It is consolatory to reflect that all the processes of a well-ordered prison have an improving tendency. This fact I will attempt to establish upon sound and unsuspecting testimony.

W. Y., aged 50 years, underwent two years' imprisonment at Cold Bath Fields for forgery. Until his conviction, he had been in the position of a gentleman, and had filled the post of mathematical professor in one of the public institutions of the country. He was, therefore, necessarily, a man of superior intellect. On the day preceding his release, I sought to obtain his opinion of the prison, and implored him to express his genuine sentiments, and not to seek to gratify me by complimentary remarks, which his real judgment might belie. Thus solicited, he answered with ready alacrity as follows—"I cannot speak otherwise than favourably, for I do not believe it possible for any human being to go through the discipline and teaching of this prison without being bettered by them;" and he added, emphatically—"if there is any good in a man, it must be brought out!"



He proceeded to inform me of one portion of his observation, to which I listened with much curious interest. At every recurring session, drafts of from 70 to 150 prisoners were added to our numbers, and consisted principally of those convicted of felony. The new comers, when clothed, were consigned to various 'yards' allotted to their class, and thenceforth became part of those divisions. W. Y. affirmed that it was a singular trait in many of these newly-imported subjects, to exhibit their vicious dispositions by every spiteful ebullition in their power. When unperceived by the warders, they would grin at anyone whose bearing denoted him to be of a better order, would mischievously put out a foot to trip him up, and by any other expedient betray their malignity; and all this without any provocation whatever. In a short time, this overt hostility would cease, and by degrees their features would relax into suavity, and their conduct exhibit quite a different spirit. He could scarcely forbear laughing, while he detailed to me his two years' experience amongst such a diversity of



faces and strange characteristics ; but I could not fail to observe the sincerity with which he testified to the humanizing tendency of our discipline, even upon such unpromising objects.

Amongst the abandoned class a beneficial modification is the limit, individually attainable, which I assign to your exertions. You can and ought to suppress contamination, and relieve your prisons from the stigma of being seminaries of vice. You should instruct to the full extent of your ability, in school, in chapel, and by personal expostulation. Encourage industry in every practicable branch ; it has an ameliorating influence. If you attempt to enter the markets you must observe the strictest rules of fair public competition ; you can, however, always minister productively to the wants of your own establishments. Retain penal and distasteful occupations for those who deserve no other, elevating into more dignified employments gradually, or as you perceive encouragement to be beneficial ; and thus you foster creditable emulation. In short, work



zealously, as though you hoped to realize the utmost success, assured that, at least, you assuage the asperities of dispositions brutalized by crime, and render them the less dangerous to the community. Remembering, however, the abandoned profligacy which marks the course of a common thief, be not absurdly sanguine of his return to virtuous courses. Having done your utmost, you have satisfied your conscience, and must be content to leave the result to the unerring wisdom of Providence.

In the midst of the serious difficulties which have, of later years, beset the subject of secondary punishments, by the impediments to transportation, I believe the best solution to have been offered by Mr. Charles Pearson. His scheme involves all that I have recommended, with the advantage of being self-sustaining; and it holds out the reasonable expectation of contributing to the pecuniary necessities of the state. In the circumstances of the country it appears to me to be the only plan, yet suggested, which seems equal to meet the exigency. The separate system, as



a whole, has signally failed, but it may be made usefully available as a means of *punishment* in short sentences, or as a resort to check attempts at escape, or to visit such flagitious crimes as are calculated to place the perpetrators almost without the pale of human sympathy.

There has existed a powerless void in the authoritative recognition of distinctive punishments. Sentences of universal application are lamentably inadequate to meet crimes of abhorrent character. Death is now rarely inflicted, while the utmost extent of transportation, indiscriminately applied, will not suffice, as an example, to avenge the atrocities which many a miscreant does not scruple to commit. A code of discriminating sentences would be most desirable ; but at present the whole subject of secondary punishments seems to be a tangled web of doubt and perplexity, and I know of none other but Mr. Charles Pearson's well-considered proposition, that offers an adequate remedy for such a complicated mass of embarrassments.

Many are the reasoners, moreover, who



contend that our present dilemma is richly merited, and that we ought long since to have provided, within the limits of our own country, for our own depraved subjects, rather than rid ourselves of a nuisance by inflicting a pestilent scourge upon several rising communities. It is, indeed, a sad reflection, that the abhorrent language, and the detestable habits of the vilest miscreants of the vicious haunts of London should have been transmitted from England to corrupt infant colonies, and confer an irradicable curse upon our distant possessions. We only mock them by our profession of a supply of labour, while we taint their soil and infect their atmosphere by the presence of the most abandoned of our population, and the outpouring of every moral impurity.

England, deprived of an outlet for her convicts, must devise the means for even *perpetual* imprisonment; and I know how inadequate is the system of separation to meet the requirement; nor is the silent discipline, in its hitherto restricted organization, a whit more applicable to the altered circumstances in which the country is placed.



Mr. Pearson's suggestions, on the contrary, offer the only practical resource yet propounded. The scheme is susceptible of amplification, and a special committee of practical men might advantageously combine to examine into the minutest details, with a view to found an enlarged and well-digested system, calculated to embrace the whole category of crime. The subject will not much longer admit of shifts, expedients, and delays; the necessity must be confronted, and provided for.

Many advise—and with some show of reason—that men sentenced to transportation (which does not now mean expatriation) and penal servitude, should be employed upon the public works; aid in the construction of fortifications, harbours of refuge, or other objects requiring physical exertions, for which all unskilled labourers would seem to be naturally competent. The practicability of such a scheme, must depend upon the locality. Crowds of convicts, employed in open and unfenced spaces, and divided into numerous gangs, would require a somewhat costly guard



to restrain, or necessitate the use of shackles to impede escape. The latter, common enough on some parts of the Continent, would scarcely be tolerated in free England, except in dockyards and arsenals, walled, and secured from general intrusion. Moreover, the desperation engendered by interminable slavery, or years of prospective *duresse*, would lend hardihood to numerous daring men, who, under such circumstances, would be enabled to combine, and the very tools entrusted to them for work, might be employed as weapons against their keepers. In this scheme, I cannot contemplate practical arrangements at all equal to the exigency; and it presents at best but a very partial remedy. Mr. Pearson's plan, on the contrary, displays the elements of a perfect system, and would leave the country at liberty to hire free labourers for the public works.

Here let me say, that the utmost care must be taken not to drive criminals, adjudged to undergo the longest sentences, into a state of desperation by the withdrawal of all hope of alleviation. Perseverance in good conduct,



unwearied industry, and perfection in mechanical arts, useful to the establishment, might be made to entitle convicts, thus distinguished, to an improved condition, to more generous fare, and to privileges of various kinds, graduated by a discreet consideration of what may befit so exceptional a society. My experience has revealed to me the *impossibility* of working exclusively by coercion. You must not, by extremities, reduce to despair; you must improve the disposition, and elevate the mind, by rational encouragement, assured that kindness, and discriminating mercy, will beget suavity, and a grateful recognition, evidenced by behaviour. If a maximum of three years' imprisonment demanded such discretion, how much more must it become indispensable under the depressing application of ten, fifteen, twenty years' of *duresse*, and extending even to incarceration for life. However, these, and other regulations, may be condensed into a practical code, framed in a spirit of salutary strictness, largely qualified by mercy. Meanwhile, I am earnestly desirous to invite attention to the comprehensive-



ness of Mr. Pearson's plan, which promises, as I devoutly believe, to strip the subject of its main perplexity. I have long since given it my conscientious adhesion, assured as I am that no project has yet been disclosed which promises more important results.

Numerous reflections upon the government of convicts have been made by Captain Machonochie, R.N., gathered from his experience as governor of the penal settlement of Norfolk Island. He has, in various ways, submitted his views upon that subject to the public ; but neither his antecedents at Norfolk Island, nor his subsequent career at the New Prison at Birmingham, have invested his opinions with a very high authority. One point, however, which he has suggested, is most worthy of consideration—viz., the substitution of 'marks' for a fixed term of sentence. It is proposed that these marks should be made redeemable by conduct or industry, and thus the convict's fate would, to a great extent, repose in his own keeping. A scale of marks, computed to operate as rewards,



would tend to expunge fractions of the sentence, while a reversal of the rule to punish bad conduct, would equally, by the convict's own fault, aggravate his position.



### CHAPTER III.

#### ESCAPES.

THE superior of a prison is continually disturbed by the apprehension that very many of his charge have a restless anxiety to escape. The affectation of good nature, or the hope to curry favour with me, frequently led members of my flock to relate the vows they had heard breathed, in Newgate or elsewhere, that no obstructions should deter certain parties from making the attempt to be free. It was politic in me to profess to despise those threats; but the legal consequences involved in an escape, where negligence is discoverable (and who could say how facts might be interpreted),



together with the reckless characters of a select portion of my criminals, combined to perturb my mind, and banish supreme confidence.

If the mere safe custody of convicts were the sole end aimed at, the superior might repose in tolerable security; but where industrial occupations were countenanced, even to the extent of constructing and repairing buildings, and the inmates became necessarily entrusted with numerous instruments of labour, the opportunities of extensive survey existed, and tools might be secreted in spite of the sternest rules to search the men and count the implements. The constant sense of the possibility of escape, was, consequently, a cause of ceaseless discomfort. Still, considering the vast extent of the establishment, and the immense concourse of prisoners at Cold Bath Fields, we were fortunate in the paucity of actual escapes.

The first adventure of that nature occurred on a day succeeding my reproof of a foreman, who superintended some buildings, then erecting by contract. In the presence of the chair-



man of the committee, I had rebuked him for the carelessness with which he left planks unguarded ; and the very next morning, a dense fog favouring the attempt, a felon succeeded, by the aid of one of those very planks, in ascending the outer wall ; where, leaving the prison cap on the parapet, he jumped down a depth of sixteen feet, and made off. The sequel constituted my first lesson in making scant information the base of pursuit, and of gradually increasing intelligence.

The clever feats and reputed aptitude of police officers, in tracing out offenders, lost, by this example, much of their astuteness in my estimation ; for the old observation of the snow-ball gathering in its course, is not more true than was the accumulation of discoveries guiding me to the promise of ultimate success.

The man was imprisoned under the assumed name of Clarke, and, when he was missed, we knew nothing whatever of his previous history. In prosecuting our inquiries, one man informed us, he believed his real name to be Mc C—— ; another had heard him say, while in Newgate, that he had two brothers employed in the



Boro'; and a third had gathered from him that he had worked for some weeks at Chelsea Hospital as a bricklayer's labourer, during some extensive repairs. With these bare outlines we set to work. I despatched two intelligent officers to the Boro', first to seek out the brothers, and then to act according to the information they might glean. The brothers were found, and their resemblance to the fugitive assured my men of their identity. Cautious interrogatories elicited the fact, that the missing prisoner had formed some disreputable acquaintances residing in a certain court of St. Luke's, whom the brothers believed to have caused his ruin. Thither my officers hastily repaired, and, wisely abstaining from asking questions, lest their object should thus be defeated, they resolved to watch the court during the remainder of the day.

Towards evening, my anxiety prompted me to go to Chelsea Hospital, and there make my own inquiries. I did so, and after some trouble, and with the aid of an official, I found a man who had known the object of my search. By him I was directed to a neighbouring



broker, who was said to have known him better. The broker referred me to the house in which he had lodged in Blacklands; there I ascertained the address of Mc C—'s wife, who, however, was from home when I called; but, conceiving I had gained a sufficient clue for further operations on the morrow, I returned home to hear the welcome tidings that the runaway had been captured, and was then re-caged. He had imbibed somewhat freely, and, to the joy of my messengers, was at dusk seen reeling up the court, from whence he was speedily transferred to a cab and conveyed back to the prison, after having enjoyed a frolic of eight or nine hours, the fruit of which was a further sentence for the escape of four months' imprisonment. Subsequent crimes led to an after conviction of felony, and Mc C——, *alias* Clarke, was at length transported.

The foregoing recital will show that he whose vocation is the capture of delinquents, has not to struggle against such insurmountable obstacles as the world may imagine. Activity and perseverance enable him to discern new



light at every fresh step, and in the face of sedulous investigation it is hard, indeed, for delinquency to stand the test of untiring scrutiny.

Two men—who were undergoing each a year's imprisonment for felony—were discovered to have been the perpetrators of a daring burglary at Hoxton. The examinations into that charge were conducted by Mr. Laing—then a police magistrate—within the walls, and a commitment for trial, and removal for that purpose, by writ of *habeas corpus*, resulted in their conviction, and the sentence upon both of a long period of transportation. First, however, they were remanded to Cold Bath Fields, to fulfil their original sentence. During the short sickness of one of these criminals, he had the opportunity, from the lofty windows of the infirmary, to reconnoitre the area, contiguous to the felon-yard, which he and his associate in crime occupied. At that period there existed freedom of speech amongst prisoners, three of whom slept in one cell.

Within a few days of the completion of the first sentence, the two burglars formed their



design to escape, and easily outwitted the turnkey — a superannuated serjeant, whose growing incapacity had already caused me regret. First, one of them—while ‘cleaner’—contrived to wrench off the top bar of a small grate (then unused), substituting part of the handle of a broom, well smeared with smut. This would serve the purpose both of a crow-bar and a weapon. Secondly, they induced a fellow to exchange berths with one of them, and thus the two conspirators became companions in the same cell, favoured in their scheme by the darkness of the locking hour, which also concealed the features of the intruder from the observation of the third occupant.

Once out of the cell, to reach the roof of the treadwheel stage, and (watching the night-guard pass in the progress of his extensive beat) opportunely descend into the garden, and thence, by means of a serpentine water-pipe, and the window sills of my house, ascend to the parapet of the outer wall (there about twenty-two feet in height), were not impossible feats, especially for practised burglars. To drop from that elevation into the



paddock without the wall, was, however, the crowning hazard; but all these risks they had determined to encounter, and at past midnight, when the third party was soundly sleeping, they began—as noiselessly as in such a work was possible—the dislodgement of bricks, so as to create an aperture equal to allow their bodies to creep into the yard. In five minutes' time they would have effected their purpose.

The most remarkable part of this incident, however, is the singular but daring conduct of the third party, who, suddenly awaking and becoming cognizant of the design, said, “You’re making your escape; you shall not; I’ll call the watchman!” In vain did the two desperadoes threaten violence, and even death; the resolute fellow jumped up, and shouted with all his might to the watchman within the building. A general alarm was sounded; the seven or eight turnkeys—forming a night-guard—were aroused, and armed. I was called up, and, in the dead of a dark night, lanterns gleamed, swords flashed, and carbines were loaded, and thus we repaired through the arched passages, expecting the unravelment of an extensive



plot. One of the ruffians stood with the bar uplifted, as if prepared to strike, but the sight of so many armed men awed him into submission, and, dropping his arm, he allowed himself to be ironed. It was really a scene for a painter.

So many bricks came rolling down, as the cell door was opened, that the wonder was how the third man had so long slept amidst an extensive demolition. But for the certainty of retribution, his life would, doubtless, have been sacrificed. He received, as was his just due, an ample reward for his rare courage; while all opprobrium towards the two unhappy men was hushed, on my part, by the feeling observation of one of them (whose engaging physiognomy belied his character)—“Consider, sir, the terrible prospect before us, however bad we may be! Would *you* not, if you were in our places, try to escape from it?” “True,” I replied, “I certainly should;” and I forthwith removed the irons, and only renewed them to render their transit from Cold Bath Fields to Newgate secure.

A late magistrate (Mr. McWilliam), who



was eminently useful in promoting our building processes, caused the smithy to be raised. This workshop possessed the fault of leaning against the outer wall, which, in common prudence, ought to have been also raised in an equal degree, at least. That precaution, however, was neglected ; and a youth, about eighteen years of age, named Pink, employed in the general works, and having thus a larger range of action, espied the defect, and resolved to profit by it. The silly youth had already exhausted eleven out of his sentence of twelve months' imprisonment, but so yearned for liberty, that he abandoned common calculation and discretion ; and at close of day, consequently, he seized the opportunity to ascend the roof of the smithy, whence a slight bound enabled him to clutch the wall, and mount upon it. The descent into the street, however, startled him, and he dared not venture to drop down. The evening was as dark as evening could be ; and, under cover of the darkness, that timid youth walked and crept, alternately, on the broad parapet of a wall encircling at least eight acres of ground, until he



reached some small houses, on the east side, abutting upon the wall, and only a step from it. There he entered a window, and, descending by the staircase, he took to his heels.

No sooner had he been missed, than pursuit commenced ; and, his father's residence having been ascertained, it was closely invested, notwithstanding a stout denial of the lad's presence in it. In the morning, successful flight having been found impracticable, the father (who was greatly discomposed by his son's rashness) proposed terms of surrender, simply exacting that I would promise to treat the lad with as much consideration as I consistently could. That undertaking given, the fugitive was again delivered into my hands. As a matter of policy, a prosecution took place, with a recommendation to mercy, on the part of the visiting justices themselves ; and, a conviction necessarily ensuing, the youth was sentenced to fourteen days' additional imprisonment. Like multitudes of other youthful delinquents, corrupted by vicious association, he persevered in crime, and was subsequently transported.



Years rolled on without our experiencing any untoward accident of this kind, and we began to indulge in notions of perfect impunity, when, latterly, and within a comparatively short interval, no less than four prisoners contrived to effect their flight. Our weak point, and the one involving the main insecurity, was the employment of prisoners in such handicrafts as appertained to all repairs or additions to the buildings. The works effected by their instrumentality were both extensive and complicated ; and, demanding the daily and hourly application of nice workmanship (which was always most willingly tendered), suspicious vigilance too frequently gave place to an almost involuntary confidence. Planks, ladders, ropes, &c. were always either secured by lock and key, or employed under the supervision of an officer ; but, as we learned by experience, practical builders are fertile in the expedients of their craft, and, moreover, climb like squirrels.

Thus, an able carpenter was set, unwatched, to hang the door of a cell, situated in an obscure corner. No apparent means were acces-



sible to minister to escape—when, lo! his ingenuity proved more than a match for the discernment of the ‘warder of the works,’ an old and careful officer. With more dispatch than an ordinary mortal would conceive possible, the artizan-prisoner dislodged the stiles of the door (two long uprights and a short cross-piece, forming the inner frame), promptly screwed them together to obtain the required length, and adding thereto a sort of rake-head, he was enabled to hook the parapet of the outer wall. This effected, he raised himself hand over hand, and having reached the top, pulled up his simple ladder, and, making it depend in like manner over the outer side, coolly descended and ran off. He was observed by many people, not one of whom would intercept him, and he became, to me, irrecoverably lost.

Again, a felon prisoner, an able bricklayer, in the course of his vocation in the prison, narrowly surveyed the construction of a shed used to deposit loose planks and ropes, and closely proximate to an elevated ‘fly-wheel,’ (the governing power of the treadwheel) by



far too near to the outer wall. This perilous malcontrivance presented an actual temptation to adventurous prisoners, and was at length shut out from their observation by a transverse wall. The fellow in question was a good workman, but an idler and a sot, who, to enjoy his pipe and pot, preferred house-breaking to bricklaying. He had been before in the prison, and there he observed the best outward conduct. Having been left, in seeming security, for five minutes, he took out the frame of a very small semicircular window, inserted his body, and speedily withdrew two suitable planks and a piece of rope. With one plank he formed a footing extending from the brick frame-work of the fly-wheel to the wall, and the other he perpendicularly raised. Upon that pedestal he ascended the wall, and, by a prompt disposition of the rope, let himself down, and decamped.

The most vexatious part of this occurrence was, that an utterer of base coin, then hoeing in the garden (between whom and the bricklayer there had been no collusion whatever), beholding the bridge thus miraculously con-



structed, took advantage of it, and passed over too. The originator of the scheme, within a fortnight, was apprehended by a police constable at Hillingdon, who recognized him as he walked along the road, solely from the description circulated in the *Hue and Cry*. He was consequently restored to us, and received an augmentation of sentence for his temerity, and his cumulative sentence lapsed shortly before I retired from my office. The utterer, however, a fine young man, whose vicious character had caused his dismissal from a battalion of the Guards, got safely away, and I thenceforth could discover no clue to lead to his recapture. He was an itinerant utterer, and wandered about the country, subsisting by those villanous arts which, in his calling, are always practised upon the humblest of the trading community.

It may appear unaccountable to many readers, how it chanced that such persons should have enjoyed the opportunities I have just described. In addition to the handicraftsmen of whose competency we availed ourselves, many prisoners were selected as gardeners, or



general labourers. It was part of our practice to assign all convicts to penal occupations during the earlier months of their imprisonment, and then, if their behaviour should prove satisfactory, to draft them off to 'the works.' That employment was much coveted, and constituted, at once, a reward for steady conduct, and a means of sustaining, by a slight change of air and scene, the health of those sentenced to long terms. In this way, it happened that the utterer, whose escape I have recited, had then been found employed in the garden.

The last escape which I have to record, was also effected by an utterer of base coin, who had the additional reputation of being an accomplished coiner. It happened in the summer of 1854, in a detached radiating building of considerable magnitude, designated the misdemeanour prison, which had likewise, injudiciously, been made to abut upon the eastern portion of the outer wall. There one of our active and able magistrates had most usefully discovered a means of adding considerably to our sleeping cells. Numbers of arched cavities corresponding with the cells



above, formed an extended basement, analogous to ordinary cellarage. Completely buried from view by consolidated earth, of considerable depth and extent, whose superficies formed an airing yard for the inmates, it was only necessary to remove the earth, cut away part of the brick-work up to the crown of each arch, insert the ordinary semi-circular cell window and a door, and you obtained as many cells on this ground floor as in each of three several tiers above it. At the extremity of the yard, nearest to the outer wall, was a succession of arches (the necessity of which was best known to the architect), and, in order to comprehend the full extent of the feat I am about to relate, it is essential to understand the nature of the scene of action.

A considerable number of imprisoned navigators, picked up the ground and filled the barrows, and a long line of prisoners, under escort, wheeled away the earth through an aperture in the outer brick-work, capable of being closed at will by a strong door, furnished with one of Chubb's stoutest mortice locks. During the intervals for meals, the tools and



short ladders, &c., were deposited under the arches (open from within), the strong door was locked, and the key removed by the warder, and thus a safe barrier appeared to oppose exterior egress. On this occasion, a depth of ten or twelve feet had been cleared away, and the work was progressing inwards, when two o'clock in the afternoon found some ninety prisoners silently seated at dinner, under the supervision of three officers.

No sooner had grace been said, than up suddenly jumped the coiner, and, simulating intense pain, writhed and grimaced most effectively, and then rushed, as if impelled by dire necessity, out of the door. His retirement was watched up to a certain point, where he was unsuspectingly left. Watching for a few moments, he darted along the yard, jumped down the hollowed space, and was forthwith within the arches. There, seizing a pickaxe, he severed the door from the lock (the arches completely subduing the reverberation, so that not a sound was heard without), he grasped the longest ladder, and putting it against the outer wall, mounted, and thence dropping into



the Bagnigge Wells Road, ran with speed, and successfully effected his retreat.

When, within a few minutes, we became aware of our loss, we were stupified at the boldness of the design, and the rapidity of its execution. Moreover, there stood the ladder, to all appearance, much too short to have availed, and it was a question, whether the attempt of any other man would not have resulted in a heavy fall, and serious injury. The fugitive must, therefore, have displayed boldness and steady nerve; and, altogether, the combination of invention and adroitness entitled the man to success, if ever success could legitimately be desired to crown such an enterprise.

He was too notorious in the circles of fraud to be safe from re-capture; and I heard of him, in various ways, from time to time. To elude the description we had caused to be published in the *Hue and Cry*, he shaved off his whiskers, assumed a wig, and must have lain comparatively still for some time. A man, who professed to know all his family, called upon me, and, first sounding me as to the pro-



bable reward for his apprehension, ended by assuring me he would restore him shortly to my custody. However, the pertinacious culpability of the fugitive himself ensured his own restitution to prison. He was again apprehended on a charge of uttering base coin, was committed to the Central Criminal Court, there again convicted, sentenced to a long term of imprisonment, and returned to my charge in due course. So completely, however, had he metamorphosed his countenance, that he had been some days in the prison before he was recognized. At first, he stoutly denied his own identity, but at length found it prudent to admit the fact. The customary prosecution took place, but the prisoner was very little damaged by the judgment of Mr. Sergeant Adams, whose many excellent qualities I esteemed and respected, but whose views upon the subject of prison-breaking I think most mistaken.

While it is a duty enjoined upon all the Queen's subjects to respect and to obey the laws, and when the statutes provide a punishment for the offence of which I am treating,



the reasoning that divests a convicted criminal of his allegiance to those laws is such as I cannot comprehend. In my opinion, he is adding to his former guilt, by employing trickery and violence to enable him to become again dangerous to society, from which the law has excluded him. In the case I have recorded, it was no culpable remissness, on our parts, that so soon made that man a pest to the public; for the visiting justices themselves, in their after-inspection of the locality, could not find in their hearts to attach blame to any one. It was the culprit's own criminal invention, indifference to the damage he committed, and a daring hardihood which spurned all legal restraint, that combined to effect his flight. It was (and is, in all such cases) open rebellion against the laws of the land, and the well-being of society; and, in my humble opinion, a judge is called upon to stigmatize and to punish such malignity. Those in the position of criminals should be taught that they must not aggravate their offences by further conspiring against the laws they have heretofore despised and violated; and I have never been



able to appreciate a reasoning which goes to spare the lawless aggressor at the expense of the community already wronged by his misdeeds. However, that man escaped with a merely nominal judgment.

I have now, I believe, enumerated all the escapes which occurred at Cold Bath Fields during the twenty-five and a half years of my government of that prison. Out of a population numbering 230,000, or thereabouts, only six persons contrived to elude our vigilance; and, of that number, two only escaped recapture—a proof, I think, of a very well organized system of repression. There remains but one part of this subject to be noted.

The metropolitan police system provides for prompt intelligence from head-quarters to all its divisions, and the several stations were invariably, on our information, made acquainted with the full particulars of an escape. Still, I have reason to believe that no very energetic exertions were used by police-constables to arrest a fugitive, unless there should appear some prospect of reward to sweeten their alacrity. The theory of the service seems to imply that



a force, organized especially for the public security, shall be paid to fulfil its functions, and look for no additional requital; and, therefore, even in cases where the liberality of individuals may stimulate them to reward successful activity, it cannot be done without the concurrence of the commissioners.

We owed the restitution of one prisoner to a police constable, but that officer acted under the expectation that he should be rewarded, and he was so. Now I am not disposed too sternly to censure an humble officer, very scantily remunerated, because he has failed to exhibit excessive ardour in the capture of a watchful runaway, who may not be disposed tamely to allow his retreat to be intercepted.

Human nature sets bounds to ambition, especially when it is both ignoble and unprofitable; nor will it prompt the exercise of arch discrimination in tracing the outlines of features but faintly delineated, where nothing but trouble awaits the recognition. Moreover, an adventure fails to prove sublimely inspiring which involves the chances of a desperate encounter, for the empty satisfaction of ful-



filling a duty fraught with peril, and merely rewarded with feeble commendation. The very feat already accomplished by a prison-breaker argues an unwonted amount of cool determination. He is a man not likely to forbear, and the policeman who besets his path may lay to his account a deadly struggle, at least. It is therefore, I conceive, one of those undertakings into which a man requires some encouragement to impel him to enter.

The visiting justices, simply to uphold a barren principle, always declined to offer rewards in case of escape. In my opinion, that was an unwise determination. It did not arise from any lack of liberality, since whenever a capture had been effected, there was no disposition to withhold due recompence from whomsoever might deserve it. Now, surrounded as the metropolis is by that useful body, the police, I think, if their acumen should be sufficiently stimulated, a formidable barrier might be opposed to the successful evasion of this class of fugitives, but as the danger to the officer is imminent, an adequate incentive to his tact and courage would operate beneficially for public security.



## CHAPTER IV.

### SUICIDES — SIMULATIONS, AND OB DURACY TENDING TO ENDANGER LIFE.

NOTHING can better attest the tenacity with which men cling to life, than the fact that, in a receptacle so crowded with erring but desponding men, as was that vast prison, twenty years should have elapsed without our having had to deplore a single suicide. For many years, the daily average number of convicts exceeded one thousand; the social positions and degrees of guilt must, therefore, have been essentially different. While many were utterly degraded and abandoned, and inaccessible to shame or remorse, others, on the contrary,



were susceptible of deep emotion. Their hearts must have recoiled at the contemplation of their lost condition. In the darkness and solitude of bare stone cells, what bitter griefs must have assailed their minds !

Let those who have never sunk so low, apply to their own souls the unutterable anguish that would rend their hearts under such an extremity, and it must seem as though the sternest resolution would have failed to support them ; that the heart would throb almost to breaking, and the brain be oppressed by such a load of woe, as to impel the victim to seek oblivion in suicide. Indeed, many have avowed to me that, in the earlier period of their disgrace, they deemed they could never survive the exposure, with its attendant misery to others—more keenly felt than the ruin that had overwhelmed themselves.

It is well known, that, where self-destruction is resolved upon, no caution can avail to prevent it. To effect death by strangulation is so easy of accomplishment, that no foresight is equal to avert the calamity, where the party is earnest, and will not be deterred



from his design. I cannot help believing, therefore, that our gentle rule, and kindly deportment towards the sorrower—the kind, the benignant tone—the persuasive appeal of our exemplary pastors—and the solace which their monitions imparted to the stricken victims of despair, tended not a little to encourage hope, and to deter from a resort to deadly purposes. Certain it is, that our exemption from this most painful visitation, presents a remarkable contrast with all the probabilities of our situation, which, *primâ facie*, seemed to promise many such catastrophes.

More than twenty years ago, a thoughtless young fellow, who had exposed himself to punishment, attempted suicide in a fit of reckless temper, and very nearly effected his intention by hanging. After much trouble, suspended animation was restored, and no one ultimately more sincerely rejoiced in his delivery from premature death, than that rash young man himself.

I remember also a more recent similar attempt (happily frustrated), resulting from a desponding state of mind ; and, in that case, the subject required the closest watchfulness to



prevent the completion of the design. Our care, however, was successfully exercised.

We were frequently tormented by the simulations of vicious subjects, who thereby sought to compass some cunning device. The circumstances attending these escapades, usually denoted their designing character; and such contrivances invariably failed to reward their inventors.

Within a short period of my retirement, a man effected suicide by hanging, who had simply been committed for seven days in default of the payment of a very trifling fine. He was discovered in the morning suspended in his cell, the body being perfectly cold. To render this sad event still more afflicting, the paltry sum of a few shillings was tendered on the forenoon of the discovery, and but a few hours of patient endurance would have seen the deceased relieved from a confinement which had so evidently unsettled his intellect. Upon that occasion, Mr. Wakley, the coroner, who held the inquest, related many instances of the utter inefficacy of the most unwearied caution to prevent self-destruction, when a morbid



suicidal determination had taken firm possession of the mind.

With the exception of the case I have cited, the only other, within my memory, was one which created an intense sensation some twenty-four years since. One afternoon, a hackney-coach conveyed to the prison a man of fashionable exterior, who was handed over to my custody by one of the principal officers of Bow Street Police-office. The prisoner was charged with forgery, and proved to be a Captain H——, who had long moved in good society, and had maintained a fictitious importance by practices as subtle as they were nefarious. The very remarkable nature of the device, by which he moved in apparent affluence, proved him to be an adept in chicanery, and the invention by which he lived, denoted the abandonment of all probity. It was his practice to cut out the 'ten' or 'five' from notes of the Bank of England, and so cleverly to insert in their vacant places forty or fifty, that the fraud was undiscernable by ordinary traders, and scarcely so by official scrutineers, until they had referred to the customary accessible tests. The



Bank of England, long aware that a fraud of this strange description was in course of perpetration, had sought in vain to discover the offender, until at length the whole guilt of Captain H—— was laid bare by an occurrence which seemed a suitable commentary upon his dangerous stratagem.

Two years previously, Captain H—— had purchased a horse, duly furnished with saddle and bridle, at Beardsworth's Repository at Birmingham, had paid for them with one of those spurious notes, and received back a certain amount of change. The valueless nature of the note was, in the course of trade, soon discovered, and the loss necessarily devolved upon Beardsworth, whose chagrin sharpened his memory, and brought back the features and person of the deceiver. Still, no clue existed to favour his apprehension; and two years had rolled by in heedless search, when chance effected for Beardsworth that which inquiry had failed to elicit.

On the identical afternoon of his arrival at Cold Bath Fields, Captain H—— had been lounging in the Lowther Arcade, from the



north entrance to which he was just emerging as Beardsworth was about to enter. A mutual recognition was instantaneous, and the Captain promptly taxed his utmost speed, only to be as swiftly pursued by Beardsworth. Thus, they made the circuit of Trafalgar Square, and Captain H——, sorely pressed, breathlessly gained the starting point, only to be there run down and captured. The transit to Bow Street, the accusing deposition, and the inevitable remand soon perfected, the miserable man reached the prison, fully conscious that the incidents of that foul transaction must now transpire, and his guilty career terminate in disgrace and ruin.

I have reason to believe that, from the fatal moment of his apprehension, he had resolved upon the desperate extremity of self-sacrifice, which was accomplished under circumstances to mark the most stoical composure at the momentous crisis.

On the evening preceding his death, I had sent for him to my office, to inquire, as a matter of duty if he had any request to prefer. He seemed to be labouring under intense an-



guish ; and, with a face and voice denoting a severe internal struggle, he asked me if I would permit his fire to be well made up at the locking-hour, that, by its light, he might be enabled to write an important letter. I readily assented, and he was locked in one of the remand rooms for the night.

As I was about to be engaged all the following day, I arose early, and accompanied the chief warder in his morning muster. I chanced to precede him at the remand room, and, as the door was unlocked, I was the first to enter, and there, to my dismay, hung Captain H., suspended from the wall. He was perfectly cold, and must have been dead for some hours. On the table lay a long letter addressed to his wife, which had been written by the glare of the fire he had solicited. The stern determination to die, had been made manifest by the most elaborate means to frustrate any possible effort to save himself in the convulsive throes of strangulation. Standing on a chair, he first made his pocket-handkerchief fast to a nail, firmly fixed in the wall, and then to his neck ; and, in order effectually



to confine his hands, he bound both his wrists with his neckerchief, and passing a leg over, effectually rendered saving aid impossible. Finally, he kicked away the chair, and thus ignominiously ended his life, with the brand of felon at its close.

The letter to his wife displayed the imperturbable calmness of his intellect. The minutest details were set forth for her guidance. He gave circumstantial directions as to the disposal of property, and the application of all she could realize. He spoke of his unfortunate children with equanimity, and counselled their mother as to their education and destination, and, in short, displayed so clear and discriminating a judgement, even in that solemn extremity, that the jury, on the inquest, unanimously pronounced a verdict of *Felo de se*. Thus did a combination of duplicity and pride cut short the life of this reputed gentleman. His dishonoured remains were consigned to the earth at four cross roads in the parish of Clerkewell, not very far from the scene of his degraded exit.

Gardiner, the officer who was charged with



the conduct of the case, had possessed himself of H.'s effects, and long essayed, in vain, to unravel the secret of the fraud. He was almost baffled in the attempt, until pressing his thumb closely along the inner margin of a portmanteau, a spring gave way and disclosed a collection of fine camel-hair pencils, Indian ink, gum, and numerous 'forties' and 'fifties,' nicely imitative of the bank originals. I inspected this curious assortment of artistic appliances which completely exposed the ingenious devices of an unscrupulous mind to live in idleness, and sustain a fashionable reputation. In this miserable manner perished Captain H., a man of education and good connexions, but of innate *finesse* and depravity.

My narrative now conducts me into topics of less gravity, but not the less exhibitory of the strange society it is my business to pourtray.

The officer, in the establishment, who was, *par excellence*, the aim of endless deceptions, was the surgeon. While the medical attendant upon a family receives from its sick members the detail of their sufferings, and their own relation chiefly guides his judgment, the



surgeon of a prison can scarcely rely upon a single statement made to him by its inmates. 'Throngs of vigorous men daily beset him with a string of ailments, which, but for the effrontery they exhibited, and the waste of time they occasioned, were calculated to arouse merriment rather than sympathy. One of the prevailing disorders was 'a cutting at the heart,' and its disclosure was marked by affected contortions and wry faces enough to provoke laughter in the most dismal ascetic. Limping, shuffling, breathless, fainting 'strappers,' daily displayed the perfection of imitative art within our circle, and sometimes fairly exhausted the doctor's patience. He would often send to invite me to be present at the consultations, whenever the throng of simulators was insupportably great, and on those occasions, whosoever had by such shallow pretences evaded a portion of his labour, was sentenced to forego his dinner also.

It is manifest that great caution must have been requisite to arrive at a sound judgment, so that the surgeon's skill, and my vigilance, were equally taxed to avert injustice. No



pains were spared to test the validity of these complaints, and so successfully, that the state of health, of that vast prison, was miraculously good, and the mortality far under the average of an equal population elsewhere. It was averred by an indisputable authority—the coroner—that “the health of that prison was a phenomenon!”

Yet, the eyes of Argus would scarcely suffice to spy out the countless machinations that were practised, and fresh tricks had to be invented, and fresh orders frequently to be issued, in order to foil the schemes resorted to by a mass of cunning tricksters. Some would occasionally simulate insanity, and display the wildest freaks; but those to whom that cruel malady had been familiar, were rarely misled by its assumption, and that guise became the least successful of all adopted arts.

It is inconceivable how difficult is the task effectually to copy the gestures and incoherency of the really insane. There is something so touchingly sad in the disordered demeanour, and senseless discourses of that afflicted class, that factitious cheats utterly



fail to produce any other impression than that of contempt and disgust. On one occasion, a fellow jumped from the treadmill, stripped off his clothes, and bounding over the railings of an elevated stage into the yard (at least fourteen feet of descent), in a state of perfect nudity. There he cut the most grotesque capers ; but his contortions and extravagance proclaimed the imposture, and the refractory cell effected a very speedy remedy against any further outbreak.

Unhappily, we were never without miserable objects, whose violation of the law was erroneously ascribed to intemperance ; and the cases were not rare in which there was but one step from the police-court to the lunatic asylum. The law provides a machinery for their removal from prisons, and, meantime, padded cells, and other suitable appliances existed there, to be used as the surgeon might direct. We were, therefore, too conversant with the indications of indisputable aberration of mind to be easily deceived by the flimsy exhibitions of knaves.

Not only had we to contend against innu-



merable simulations, but to prevent wilful attempts to create temporary ailments, in order to evade labour. We were compelled to limit the quantity of water, otherwise many would drink it to excess, purposely to disorder the system. In like manner did we narrowly watch the salt, otherwise inordinate saline potations would be swallowed expressly to derange the stomach. Soap would be 'pinched,' and rolled into pills, in order to found the complaint of diarrhœa. Lime-white was applied to the tongue, and any available rubbish would be bolted to force on a momentary sickness. Daring youths, who winced not at pain, were constantly in the habit of making 'foxes,' and then, by an adroit fall, or an intentional contact with the revolving treadwheel, writhe and gesticulate, to give colour to their deception. The techinal term 'fox' signifies wilful abrasion of the skin, or laceration of the flesh, mostly on the hands and arms, but more generally on the legs, and the wounds sometimes inflicted led us to marvel how any rational being could voluntarily court so much torture, rather than heartily perform a practical task, and continue sound and active.



But the climax of imposture was attained in the example of a 'rogue and vagabond' named Troy, who, as a simple begging cheat, acquired that designation by his violent resistance to the police, at the moment of his apprehension. He was what is termed a tall, lanky young man, with a very plain and even forbidding countenance, and was apparently about twenty-one years of age. In prison, determined not to work, he affected illness with such pertinacity, that it was deemed by the surgeon the safer course to place him in the infirmary, and have him watched. There, the opinion soon prevailed that he was practising imposition, and, consequently, T. was compelled to throw greater energy into his fraud. An aggravated fit seemed to distort his countenance, and to fix his eyes, and his life (should the external symptoms prove real) appeared to be now in danger. The surgeon still had his misgivings, but he was sorely perplexed, and at length sought the advice of Dr. Roots, an eminent physician, who resorted to various medical tests to guide his judgment. The result was



the conviction that the case was genuine, and the patient's condition alarming. His head was therefore shaved, and a blister was applied from the crown—and thence right down the back to the termination of the spine, while other suitable applications followed.

Meanwhile T's sentence was drawing to a close, and, with its contraction, the patient exhibited improvement, but still kept his bed, and assumed all the feebleness of a prostrate convalescent. On the day of his discharge his 'wife' came to the prison to accompany him to St. Bartholomew's Hospital, whither an order had been procured to send him. To our great surprise, she was a young woman whose exterior betokened respectability—she was neatly attired and might lay claim to considerable beauty. T. was dressed with all tenderness, conveyed on a mattress to a cab, and transferred with due care to the hospital, and there put to bed. All these processes the patient permitted, but the deception had now been carried far enough for his purpose; so, within half-an-hour of his arrival at St. Bart's, he suddenly jumped out of bed, put on



his clothes without aid, and, taking his 'wife' by the arm, coolly walked away. From first to last he had been an impostor, and all those grave symptoms had been mere well-sustained simulations.

Some months after, that identical vagabond was found practising a delusive fit in James Street, Buckingham Gate, and, being suspected by the police, was about to be apprehended, when his resistance became so desperate, that six or eight constables could scarcely effect his capture. Committed to the Bridewell at Westminster (where he was then unknown) his fraudulent tricks to evade work induced inquiries to be made at Cold Bath Fields, and his antecedent performances thus transpired. As he lay on the floor of his cell, without clothing, again simulating a fit, the infirmary warder was directed to drop, as though by accident, a little very hot water upon him; but, no sooner did he feel the smart, than, suddenly springing upon his feet, he dealt the warder a blow that felled him to the ground. What ultimately became of that arch knave, but voluntary self-torturer, I never



knew. It would, however, have been very desirable to have been able to glean some reliable intelligence as to the young creature who had allied herself to such a revolting being, both in external aspect and in innate depravity.

A curious work, brought to my notice by Dr. Tweedie, the talented physician of the Fever Hospital, in the form of a treatise on 'Feigned Diseases,' reveals a great variety of such impositions. Their too frequent display denotes the existence of a class of persons of a very anomalous organization.

Every conceivable check had to be devised, in order to counteract the numberless schemes sought to be practised against us. Thus, no pockets were allowed to be made in the prison clothes, although we too often found them stealthily attached to them ; and it was most ludicrous at times to witness their remarkable contents, turned out on casual discovery. Needles, buttons, bits of tape or string, bullock's teeth, or any strange commodity accidentally picked up, were treasured up for some clandestine use. It often puzzled us



to imagine whence those strange *et ceteras* could come, or to what end they were to be applied. A rent in the clothes, or any other requisite repair, would receive instant attention, but there seemed to exist a keen delight in effecting useless removals of the buttons, or in perfecting capricious, but aimless alterations. The manufacture of house-wives was very popular amongst this restless crew, although, when finished, they proved of little avail, and answered no end but to entail punishment on their manufacturers.

Well, all these petty contrivances necessitated a thrice-told daily periodical search. At the termination of each meal, the prisoners, seated numerically, were required to stand up alternately, while the sub-warders passed their well-pressed hands down from the arm-pits to below the hips of each individual. This observance was a matter of course; and, moreover, once a week, after morning chapel service, a more minute general search proceeded; nor was all this scrutiny a whit too close to countervail the ceaseless inventions of a host of rebellious plotters.



The same preventive foresight led us to divest all letters from the friends of prisoners, of every blank portion of paper, while the fly-leaves of books issued to them were either torn off, or pasted down, so apt were they to devote to forbidden uses any one object that promised to abet a trespass on the rules.

The prisoners were divided into fourteen classes, exclusive of the sick and convalescents. Each division was mustered in parallel lines of single files, moved singly to their meals, with their hands behind them, took their seats in silence, and waited patiently till all were seated, and grace was said, ere they were authorized to touch their food. These divisions rarely numbered less than 70, and often amounted to 110 or 115. At dinner, every one was supplied with a knife, and thus no want of confidence in their harmless dispositions was manifested.

Independent of frequent miscellaneous visits at uncertain intervals, it was my practice to go through each ward at the dinner hour; because then I could easily comply with the



law, 'to see every prisoner once in twenty-four hours,' and the inmates had also the opportunity individually to address me upon any subject relating to their own interests. In that manner, it will be seen, I passed through throngs of armed men, nor can I say that I ever experienced alarm. There were three rows of narrow tables, to suit a contracted space; and if I ever deemed an individual to be maliciously disposed (which was very rarely the case), I caused him to be so numbered as to sit at the third table, and consequently without reach of me, as I passed along the front.

Moroseness was sometimes observable, but dangerous resentment was a thing almost unknown. I met with but two instances, during the whole of my career in that prison, and these will be described hereafter. Two cases of sullen obstinacy were remarkable, both as exhibiting a morbid resolution hazardous to life, and presenting results ill according with general notions on the subject of lengthened abstinence.

A prisoner, named Charles Monk (I give



the name freely, because the man returned to the prison thereafter more than once, and the fact really requires more than ordinary attestation), was seized with a fit of moroseness, and sulkily refused to eat. It was vain to reason with, or even to entreat him; he was inexorable, and declined all food, although it was daily offered to him. He continued in this unbending frame of mind during *eleven* days, without any visible impression upon his health. After fasting during the whole of that time (in the interim merely sipping a little cold water, which was always placed in his cell), he suddenly relented, asked for a meal, and ate it with avidity. The gloom that had clouded his face was now dissipated, and his countenance beamed with complacent smiles. The singular part of the matter is, that neither throughout his long abstinence did he for an instant appear to suffer, nor was any ill effect from his protracted fast thereafter discernible. He returned with alacrity to the ordinary occupations of the prison, and became thenceforth a pattern of docility.

I have already described the contumacy of



some of our choicest specimens of female stubbornness, and have made especial mention of a girl named Bridget Summers. Amongst other evidences of that strange creature's resolute endurance was a sudden determination to take no food, and, unlike Charles Monk, she abstained even from a single sup of water. During *thirteen* days did she continue in this obstinate mood, and no reasoning or entreaty produced the slightest effect upon her. At length, nature could hold out no longer, and she arose from the almost fixed position which she had first assumed, and pertly demanded her breakfast. Each of the preceding thirteen mornings, she had arisen, made her bed in the prescribed form, and then, seating herself upon the iron trussel, placed her elbows on her knees, and, burying her face in her hands, sat for the rest of the day, absorbed in her own sullen humour. She uttered nothing but saucy invectives, and pertinaciously refused to exchange one word with me. Of necessity, she was a source of anxiety to every person charged with her safety ; but, in her instance, as well as in the former, not the slightest ail-



ment appeared to result from that abstinence. She was a girl of small, but wiry frame, and, judging from the severe inflictions—self-imposed—which she had endured in this prison, she must have possessed a constitution of unusual strength.

With these two examples to guide me, I became indifferent to an occasional exhibition of this nature. Whenever a case of sullen abstinence arose, and was reported to me in my progress through the wards, I made it a point to display the utmost unconcern, and even to appear to encourage, rather than check such a freak of temper. In the hearing of the entire class, I used to exclaim—"With all my heart, let him abstain from food, by all means. A fast of a fortnight will do him more good than harm, and the county will reap the benefit!"—then citing the two bygone cases, the simpleton was left to his reflections.

The experiment had usually been made under the hope that it would alarm and mortify me, but my well-feigned indifference, and, above all, the cases in point, seemed to operate with marvellous conclusiveness, and to work



the conviction that the penalty of perseverance was too severe to be incurred. A speedy relapse from contumacy into docility, would end in a thankful acceptance of the next meal, and even the ultra-dogged would relent within twenty-four hours, at furthest.



## CHAPTER V.

### MILITARY OFFENDERS—CORPOREAL PUNISHMENT— PUBLIC WHIPPING.

IT is inconceivable how the military authorities could have so long slumbered over the project of erecting military prisons. When the public detestation of corporeal punishment had rendered that species of correction no longer available, the soldiers convicted of offences by courts-martial, were sentenced to terms of imprisonment with hard labour, and many of them to intervals of solitary confinement. Those tribunals had power, under the mutiny act, to select the places of imprisonment ; but, for a long time, there seemed to be



little room for judicious choice, and soldiers were consigned to various provincial gaols, there to be herded with common criminals. In many such receptacles, unblest with salutary and restrictive rules, the demoralisation resulting from that indiscriminate association must have proved most disastrous to the army.

In or near London, the Millbank Prison and that of Brixton, appeared—from some not very obvious reason—to have been selected for the purpose; and the prison at Maidstone received the delinquents from the garrisons of Woolwich and of Chatham. What may have been the experience at Millbank of the tractability of military prisoners in that day, I know not; but, both at Brixton and Maidstone, the soldiers were denounced as the most turbulent of all the inmates.

In process of time, as Cold Bath Fields emerged from the slime of corruption, and began to exhibit signs of purification, military prisoners were consigned to it also. At first, in small numbers, but, as time developed the efficacy of their management, they were



gradually increased, until upwards of one hundred military delinquents were at one period incarcerated within those walls. My first experience of imprisoned soldiers (before the imposition of silence, as a rigid rule) led me to regard them as men imbued with most absurd notions of self-importance. They rated themselves conventionally superior to the other criminals, without reference to the conduct which had brought them there; and they were clamorous for superior treatment, because they 'paid for their maintenance.' As in the case of billeting soldiers, a sum is awarded to the victualler, so, as some indemnity for the expense incurred by counties, sixpence per day was allotted for the maintenance of each soldier, a sum quite inadequate to defray the whole cost incurred of his keeping.

The incarcerated soldier, in demanding his 'right,' never allowed his calculation to embrace the expenses of medical and other attendance, building, clothing, and bedding, but computed solely with reference to edibles. Consequently, any noisy fellow amongst them, who was an abstruse arithmetician, would



divide his sixpence into fractions, and apportion the parts to so much bread, meat, and vegetables, and prove, to the entire satisfaction of his comrades, that they had not near enough for their money. At first, I tried the effect of gentle reasoning, but found that quite inefficacious—for in proportion as I became argumentative, the soldiers waxed positive, until I was compelled to become despotic, command them to receive my dictum as indisputable law, and conform to it submissively, or take the consequences. I often look back with some amusement to my numberless contests on this head (for the importation of fresh batches caused the frequent renewal of the controversy); but I never experienced the difficulty with this class so emphatically complained of elsewhere, nor did I ever regard my military convicts as the most ungovernable of all my inmates; for this simple reason, the summary maintenance of my authority soon became marked and feared. And here let me observe, that such decision must be displayed in the treatment of ignorant and corrupt bodies, otherwise order and obedience can never be sustained.



The time, however, arrived when consultation and combination amongst prisoners of every description were to cease; and, from that moment, harmful incitement became extinct amongst soldiers also. The fame of the silent system circulated, and regiments, equally with the general public, became cognizant of its benefits. While the rare discipline upheld in that crowded prison was honourable to the county of Middlesex, it became, *quoad* the military, injurious to it; for now the several battalions of the guards, the Royal Artillery, the Royal Marines, and various regiments of the Line consigned their culprit men to Cold Bath Fields in such numbers, that the burden upon Middlesex, both in the absorption of space and the cost of maintenance, became onerous, and necessitated remonstrance from the visiting justices.

From the distant quarters of some corps, the liability of contiguous prisons was overlooked; and, passing them by, soldiers were marched up even from Chatham, Canterbury, and other remote towns, to Cold Bath Fields, in order to reap the fruits of its strict manage-



ment, until an array, exceeding a hundred military defaulters, filled, exclusively, one of the yards of the main building. It was really a fine sight to see so many well-trained men, with their erect and stately bearing, exercising in a prescribed form of simple arrangement, whereby, in serpentining files, a limited space was made ample, and the quick step and measured tread secured. We applied the same system of exercise to every yard; but to go from one composed of men of promiscuous callings, or, indeed, of none whatever, where so many could not discard their slovenly gait—to go, I say, from such untutored bands to the soldiers' yard, where all betokened the refining efficacy of drill, and there to mark the contrast, was most pleasing to my own eyes, and never failed to strike with wonder the casual visitor.

But we triumphed, *par excellence*, in the exemplary conduct of those men. A struggle in the outset left us victors, and thenceforth it was absolutely delightful to contemplate the rarity of punishments, and the marvellous compliance of that class with every



rule laid down for their government. They were dressed in blue (the misdemeanour costume), and distinguished by white numbers painted on a dark ground; and as there were hundreds of misdemeanants in the same costume, who were liable, in the progress of some employments, to become intermingled, the soldier was discernible by a neat white star above the number. It was never our practice closely to crop the hair of any class, unless absolute necessity, in some few cases, required it to be done; and, in the instance of the soldiers, we did not divest them of their moustachios. We kept them neatly attired, and the *coup d'œil* of that fine body of men, in full muster, was something comparatively imposing.

To me it was unspeakably gratifying to witness the ease with which that remarkable discipline was maintained. A system of encouragement throughout the prison, by the distribution of a red star attached to the left arm, after every three months of blameless conduct, entitling the wearer, on discharge, to two shillings and sixpence for each star—had



been adopted by the magistrates, and extended to the soldiers also. Unhappily, we had men of that class, sentenced to the lengthened periods of two years, eighteen months, and one year, and others with periods graduating, downwards, from that term to fourteen days; and there was scarcely a man, who had exceeded the minimum term to ensure that reward, but bore upon his arm the red star, while upon the arms of those of the longest terms stars actually clustered. From that fact their admirable behaviour may be inferred.

Nor must it be imagined that any sympathy on my part, antecedently derived, induced me to exact less of the soldier class than of others. On the contrary, I publicly professed to them, that, while it was a grateful task to testify to their good conduct, I should deem it but justice to treat lapses in them with three-fold severity. The inmates, I said, in other yards, were ignorant of the principles of subordination; while they (the soldiers) had been trained in the school of discipline, and well knew its requirements. In short, an authoritative demeanour, the strict interpretation of every



regulation, and gentle words whenever individually addressing them, with the most considerate regard to maintain their health—caused willing obedience, and, in many touching instances, the liveliest demonstrations of gratitude. Moreover, a parting certificate to the commanding officer, expressive of their conformity with the rules of the prison, was highly valued, and constituted an additional incentive to good behaviour.

Meanwhile, our mode of treatment elicited no sort of resentment; on the contrary, the men of the Guards never failed, when free, to greet me with the most respectful notice. London is an ensnaring quarter for soldiers, and dangerous to their steadiness and sobriety; and, in consequence of its numerous temptations, I was brought, I grieve to say, into a very extensive official acquaintance with the several battalions of the Guards, and occasionally with the Life Guards and the Blues. On riding through the streets of London, or in the outskirts of the metropolis, I was constantly recognized, and saluted with the precision of military etiquette. Some of the



magistrates, also, whose frequent visits to the prison caused them to be well known to its inmates, likewise attracted the same complimentary recognition, and one of them was highly amused with the unlooked-for dignity on one occasion conferred upon him.

The late Mr. McWilliam made no secret of the fact, that he had acquired the position of a magistrate from the humble origin of a journeyman carpenter. He was a man of remarkable shrewdness, and of some talent, blended, however, with much singularity. His dress and outward deportment were far from aristocratic, and few persons would gather from his exterior that he was a wealthy man, and a magistrate. His zeal and industry in the pursuit of whatever he undertook were conspicuous, and, as a visiting justice, he was indefatigable in improving and extending the prison buildings; and that object brought him almost daily to the place, where he would often, in consultation with the engineer, usefully linger for hours together. He studiously avoided any interference with my authority as governor, but, on the contrary, extended



towards me such ceaseless kindness as to kindle in my mind a very grateful sense of his consideration and attention.

Well, Mr. McWilliam was as well known in No. 5 (the soldiers' yard) as in every other in the prison ; and, as his conduct towards the prisoners was always marked by urbanity, he was regarded with perfect good will by them all. He was often amused at the frequency of military honours from individual soldiers in the streets ; but, one day, on passing the British Museum, he was startled by the sudden rattle of arms, and soon discerned that the sentry posted there had recognized him, and 'carried arms' to him in the most emphatic style. The dear old gentleman was most exceedingly diverted by that incident, and related it to me with infinite humour. His bearing was so utterly devoid of military similitude, that Heaven only knows whom the spectators could have conceived was the recipient of military honours ; but, as he chiefly dressed in black, they might have set him down as the regimental chaplain.

These passing compliments, seemingly trifling



and unimportant, were most welcome, and deserve to be recorded as indicative of the cordiality which even our stringent rule, firmly but temperately administered, failed not to elicit. Without desiring to indulge in any inordinate pretension, I may yet be allowed to say that I felt a pride in my capacity to govern congregated hosts of men; and that my success in the management of soldiers could not be fortuitous, will be apparent from the ensuing fact.

A commission had at length been issued, to examine into the desirableness of constructing military prisons, of which Lord Cathcart was president. The commissioners sought to acquire information from all the sources open to them, and for that purpose visited the various prisons in which military prisoners had long been accustomed to be confined. At Maidstone and Brixton they were told that the soldiers confined in those gaols had always proved the most turbulent and refractory of all their criminal population, and that their presence and proceedings constituted a crying nuisance. At Cold Bath Fields, however, the



commissioners learned that the very best behaved of all the imprisoned host (for it was literally such) were the soldiers, whose conduct merited unqualified eulogy.

When, at an after period, those commissioners began to sift the evidence they had collected, they became struck with the conflicting character of the prison reports; and, to acquire some elucidation to guide their judgment, they deputed one of their body (the Rev. D. Nihill) to call upon me, and inquire how I could account for the strange discrepancy. The proposition at first confused me. I pondered for an instant, and then resolved the difficulty in the following terms:—"I can suggest but one explanation. I suppose I know how to manage them, and they don't." Mr. Nihill smiled, and said, "I suppose that is it," and departed with a solution which I imagine satisfied the commissioners, for I heard no more upon the subject.

Happily, military prisons have long since been established, and the British army is relieved from the stain of sending their erring men to become tutored into fresh crimes, by



the precepts of the hardened pests of the community.

Still further to illustrate the same elements of authoritative influence, conducing to moral mastery on the one hand, and willing obedience on the other, I might cite the following example:—On one Saturday afternoon, of the summer of 1845, I was informed that two military officers desired to speak to me; and, on repairing to the office, I there found the Lieutenant-Colonel of the 65th Regiment and his Adjutant. The former intimated that he had just marched in command of the regiment into Islington, on a route to Chatham, and that he had brought with him 22 men under various sentences passed upon them by courts-martial in Ireland, where the regiment had been stationed. He described the perplexity in which he found himself by the mutinous conduct of those men, whom he could neither punish corporeally, nor effectually confine. They had troubled him throughout the march from Liverpool; but now that he had consigned them, for safe keeping, to the contiguous station-house, they had, in the colonel's



own words, "alarmed the police by their violence, and were threatening to pull down the station-house." He asked me if I could relieve him from the difficulty, by taking charge of them till Monday morning. I readily pointed out to him a clause in the Mutiny Act, which invested him with the power to command my services; and the adjutant having drawn up the requisite order, it was signed by the colonel, and delivered to me. The colonel expressed his thanks to me, and, offering some remarks upon the trouble I should experience with "such a mutinous set of fellows," took his leave. The real fact was, he, from circumstances, was powerless to act; but that was not the case with me.

The police-vans soon approached the gates, escorted by a detachment of the 65th, and followed by an immense crowd, which the novel sight had attracted; and, as the delinquents marched one by one through the inner barrier, nothing could exceed the defiant air they assumed. When mustered, the attitude of most was wilfully disrespectful; but when I firmly said I required them to stand 'atten-



tion,' they obeyed to a man. I then addressed them in the following terms :—" I have heard a bad account of your conduct on the march, and of your violence at the station-house ; but I warn you all, that any exhibition of the kind here will meet with instant punishment. The law will allow me to put you in irons, or confine you in dark cells on bread and water, or I may even send to solicit the aid of a magistrate, who may cause any, or all of you, to be flogged. However, having explained our power, let me now advise you, as a friend, to show yourselves prudent men, and abstain from aggravating your present situation. No one here desires to insult or ill-treat you ; and you, on your parts, must observe quietude and obedience. I shall place you in a ward by yourselves, where you must conform to the orders of my officers, and act as reasonable men. The law has defined what your rations are to be, and you must content yourselves with them. Go, therefore, and observe my advice ; but, remember, I shall not repeat it ; you will take the consequences of your own folly."



My address produced the most deferential spirit. The men marched away in the best order, and not one uncivil word escaped their lips throughout their stay. They attended chapel on Sunday, behaved with the utmost decorum, and conformed with the best possible grace to all that was required of them. On Monday morning they were removed; but I sent word to the colonel how exemplary their conduct had been.

I have already said, that when soldiers first became numerous in the prison, there ensued a struggle against authority. On three occasions it assumed a form which necessitated suppression by corporeal chastisement. The first case occurred with some delinquents of the 45th Regiment, six of whom had been marched to Cold Bath Fields, under sentence, from a distant quarter.

They all displayed an unruly spirit on their immediate admission; but one, a young man, aged about twenty-four years, behaved disgracefully. Without having received any provocation, he heaped insult upon the gate-warders, and made a jest of the preliminary



process of his reception ; but when I reproved him, his language was so unutterably foul, that I stood aghast with astonishment. Deeming my limited power to be quite inadequate to visit such an outrage, I merely ordered him apart from others, to guard against the possible fruit of such an example, and reserved his case for the adjudication of the visiting justices, at their ensuing meeting. When he stood charged before them, he resorted to the same brutal language ; and, in the most revolting terms the English tongue could furnish, he bade them defiance. In all investigations before the visiting committee, judiciary forms were strictly observed. The accused was present, the witnesses sworn, cross-examination permissible, and the defence demanded. These forms complied with, the prisoner was declared 'guilty,' and was adjudged to receive two dozen stripes with the cat-o'-nine-tails. The sentence elicited a fresh outburst of black-guardism, and the fellow moved off with an air of assumed triumph.

A punishment of that nature was always effectually administered, and the depraved



young man learnt too late the severe infliction he had needlessly provoked. From that time forth to the end of his term of six months, he became a pattern of docility, and exemplified the actual benefit of a timely castigation, by stepping up to me at the moment of his discharge, and in the most respectful tone thanking me for my kindness to him. I made a suitable reply, and remarked how much better it would have been if he had avoided his earlier disgrace. He immediately answered, "It would, indeed, sir; I was a very foolish young man, and deserved my punishment, but I shall never act in such a manner again."

The next rebellious subject was a private of the corps of Royal Sappers and Miners, who I subsequently discovered, bore the character, at Woolwich, of being the most abusive and foul-mouthed fellow in the corps. He was committed for a short term to my charge, but determined in that short period to distinguish himself by intolerable insolence to my subordinates, and by marking me, in particular, as the object of the vulgarest abuse. I likewise deemed his offences to be too gross for my



limited jurisdiction, and referred him also to the superior authority of the magistrates. Before them his bearing by no means pleaded in mitigation of his original conduct, and he also received the sentence of two dozen stripes with the cat-o'-nine-tails. That award, duly inflicted in the presence of his imprisoned comrades, not only abated his insubordination, but extorted thenceforth, within my observation, the most obsequious civility. A serjeant of the Sappers and Miners informed me that the castigation of that man had given real satisfaction to the whole corps, which had felt disgust at his habitual coarseness. His colonel had resorted to the various checks locally available, but could not be induced to proceed to the extremity of personal correction.

Such instances of irrational disregard of possible consequences have frequently fallen under my notice. Men have contemned urgent admonition, ridiculed considerate warning, and actually defied the menaces of their rulers, and at length, after having provoked — nay, positively courted — a painful infliction, have thereafter exhibited an ex-



treme humility and subservience. In cases of extraordinary punishment to soldiers, whether of corporeal punishment, or lengthened solitary confinement (my authority extending no further than three days in the refractory cells, with bread and water as the diet), I was instructed to write to the commanding officers, and set forth for their information both the crime and its punishment. Letters of this description were usually read to the men on parade, and thus a useful warning was made public.

The conduct of a private of the Royal Marines led to the third and last resort to the 'cat' amongst military convicts, nor do I well imagine how some notable example could, consistently with the subjection to the law, be in this case avoided. The marine in question, had incurred the sentence of imprisonment with hard labour, but no sooner had he been introduced into the treadwheel yard, than, in the presence of thirty soldiers quietly at work, he threw himself on his back, bellowed like a bull, and kicked violently at all the officers who approached him, whirling himself adroitly



round and round, and using his feet as any one approached to seize his arms. He was soon overpowered, and in due time the application of two dozen stripes wrought the customary amendment in him also, and we were spared any future manifestations of his ungovernable temper.

Wherever it was practicable, we sought to rule gently, and by persuasion and encouragement; and our kindly dispositions were trusted by the majority of our military inmates; but the above examples equally invested us with a reputation for firmness and vigour, and it became usefully known that there was a limit to endurance, and that we were not to be defied with impunity. That such indispensable severity was advantageous to our discipline, I have not the smallest doubt, nor that it aided our efforts in the attainment of an organization which proved of incalculable value to the service. The late Major-General John Freemantle, who commanded a battalion of the Coldstream Guards, at an epoch when all the difficulties of the transition state were experienced—declared at the prison committee (as



a visiting justice), that, but for that prison, he must have resigned his command. He described the consternation with which he and the adjutant daily went to the barracks, so numerous were the defaulters; and I pledge my word that, in my hearing, he declared the discipline of the prison at Cold Bath Fields had reduced them from eighty daily, in one battalion, to an average of two or three.

More fully to illustrate the matured state of discipline, of which the magistrates of Middlesex had just cause to be proud, the approving authority of General Fremantle was voluntarily tendered in the following terms. It was on the occasion of his first taking his seat as a magistrate of the county, and on the presentation of the periodical Prison Report, he thus addressed the court:—"I have commanded troops at home and abroad; I have seen discipline in every form in which it could present itself; but I never saw such discipline as in Cold Bath Fields Prison."

Those persons who advocate the total abolition of corporeal punishment, whether in the army or in prisons, display a spirit of humanity,



untempered by discretion. They have never had to contend with hosts of obstinate and brutish reprobates ; and a very short test of the means whereby to govern such a body, would most probably produce a powerful reaction into an opposite direction. I am quite willing to allow that such a mode of correction ought to resolve itself into the *ultima ratio*, and that it ought, in the cases of adults, to be fenced around by every reasonable protection to ward off its arbitrary application. Of old, in the army and navy, it was carried to a most inhuman and mischievous extent, although (speaking with reference to the military) there did not exist a desire to practice cruelty. I have known military officers, who could never attend a punishment parade without enduring the utmost pain ; and yet, strange to say, it seemed never to have occurred to any one, that the numerical stripes might be judiciously curtailed. I have frequently heard officers declare that they would always try their utmost to rule without a resort to flogging, but not even to these good and tender minds did a diminution of the customary severe sentences



suggest itself, and 'hundreds' marked the awards, where dozens of stripes would have sufficed.

I have witnessed much corporeal correction inflicted upon soldiers, and also a vast amount applied to prisoners, and the result of my varied experience is that two dozen, or even less would prove effectual (if at all) in the proportion of nine-tenths, at least, of such inflictions. That moderate castigation is beneficial—nay, *indispensable*—I firmly believe; for, where you have to deal with perverse beings, upon whom all kindness and gentle expostulation are utterly wasted, the abrogation of this most efficacious resort would prove a perfect misfortune, and necessitate such extended terms of solitude, with the scantiest diet, as would prove an aggravation of cruelty, rather than assuagement.

Whenever we were driven, at Cold Bath Fields, to the extreme expedient of whipping, I had to proclaim the correction, and its cause, to every class, and I used habitually to remark how surprised I was that any one should incur such a punishment within those walls, since no



one, who did not daringly provoke it, was in more danger of flogging than the governor himself; and the well-behaved prisoners (almost, by the way, the entire bulk) would manifest, by some intelligible signs, their acquiescence in the truth of my assertion. I have already stated the ratio of daily ordinary punishments to have been a fraction above three per cent.; but, amongst those defaulters, some instances of hardihood and iniquity would almost transcend belief.

I know that ethical writers enlarge upon the neglected condition of the criminal masses, and the moral corruption they have imbibed from vicious parents and abandoned haunts—and they thence infer that pity, and not blame, should light upon them. That is a true proposition; but, like all other salutary considerations, it must have a practical limitation. The question has always, in such cases, appeared to me to be this—"Does this vicious subject know right from wrong?" Assuredly, "Yes" would be the universal reply, because, at length, all around conspired to instruct him on the point, in addition to the natural light



of reason, which, though obscured, is rarely utterly extinguished.

That we were not barbarous in our application of the lash, may be inferred from the fact that, during the last year of my authority in that prison, out of 10,000 inmates, in the course of the whole year, *four* only were visited with corporal chastisement. The magistrates were invariably desirous to avoid its infliction, and were always the first to plead for mercy ; but some conduct would present such flagitious perversity, that the necessity for the most exemplary visitation became paramount.

Some foregone details will have informed my readers how much riot and confusion had to be endured on the female side of the prison, arising from the atrocious behaviour of a few outrageous women, or girls.

The female attendants were all women, who, ere they could be employed, were compelled to bring the most undeniable testimonials of their previous respectability. None but persons of good character and known probity could hope to be engaged ; and, as a body, they



would compare with any equal number of the humble, respectably employed elsewhere. Well, such women may fairly be presumed to have possessed the gentle dispositions of the sex generally ; and yet every one of them, and the matron included, would have rejoiced at the authority to inflict corporeal chastisement upon abandoned criminal girls. Various metropolitan workhouses (St. George's, Hanover Square, excepted) caused their refractory paupers to be committed to Cold Bath Fields, up to September, 1850, and we witnessed in the demeanour of young girls, from fifteen years of age and upwards, such revolting specimens of workhouse education, that the exhibition was at once frightful and disgusting. The inconceivable wickedness of those girls was absolutely appalling. Their language, their violence, and their indecency, shocked every beholder ; while the punishment provided by law, for their offences in prison, was restricted to solitary confinement, on bread and water, at which they positively mocked.

A very salutary provision of one of the later acts of parliament, referable to prisons, armed



the visiting justices with power to re-imprison, with hard labour, to the extent of six calendar months, for assaults on prison-officers in the execution of their duty. It proved a most valuable enactment, and greatly restrained personal violence, theretofore so rife ; but outrages against decency, and the use of the most obscene and filthy language conceivable, remained punishable as I have described. The female attendants, in the extremity of their disgust and horror, used to exclaim—"What a blessing it would be, if we could employ some stout-armed woman to give them the rod !" And so it would ! A very few such flagellations, and the knowledge of the liability to a renewal, would have doubtless worked wonders, as a prevention, and would have done no real harm.

The whipping of women, which the philanthropic Howard had so stigmatized, was of a very different description. There, the exhibition of a woman, stripped to the waist, and flogged, with the cat-o'-nine-tails, by a man, gave evidence of a barbarous age and people, notwithstanding much high polish and literary



refinement. In the case, however, of a set of abandoned young husseys, disgracing all feminine attributes, manual correction by a woman, in the presence of women only, would infuse salutary intimidation, and tend to repress scenes too painful to contemplate.

It may be as well, here, to expose the cause of such deplorable profligacy in creatures so young. It arose simply from want of space to enable parishes to separate their infant paupers; and, consequently, a general association with the corrupt of all ages wrought the ruin of those unhappy girls. The fact was prolific of the worst consequences in every workhouse in which it prevailed.

The parish of St. George, Hanover Square, had a second house with a spacious garden, at Little Chelsea; and there, under a judicious mistress, their female pauper children were reared. The exemption of the prison from similar commitments at the instance of that parish, proclaimed the simplicity of the antidote.

To revert, however, to corporeal punishments. I had not been two years in office ere I had



to attend to two *public* whippings, both for the offence of purloining silk, in large quantity, from the master manufacturers. The warrant, in such an award, contained an instruction that, after a given term of confinement, I should cause the delinquent to be publicly whipped for the space of one hundred yards, in a place duly indicated ; which, in the first case, proved to be the Commercial Road. Timely notice was given to the police, who mustered in sufficient force, and, at my bidding, the public executioner hired a cart, and himself attended with a huge cat-o'nine-tails. The culprit was conducted to the spot by my officers, and made fast by his wrists to the cart's-tail, while I also repaired to the place selected, where I found crowds of assembled spectators. On the production of the warrant, and the necessary intimation, the cart moved slowly on, and as it travelled onwards, the cat fell heavily, at intervals, on the prisoner's bare back, and at the conclusion, the condition of the skin amply proved the severity of the castigation.

My first reflection, after this exhibition, was that I and the police had been degraded, and



the public outraged by so savage a spectacle, and I heartily rejoiced when the custom fell into desuetude, or became prohibited ; I know not which. The second, and last public whipping, under my superintendence, took place in Exmouth Street, Clerkenwell, and it did not a whit more favourably impress me as to its character.

In the earlier period of my government likewise, a singular ceremony attended even the whipping of every boy, within the precincts of the prison, who had been sentenced to such a castigation at the Old Bailey—not then the Central Criminal Court. This application had long been interpreted as a duty appertaining to the city of London, and a fee, amounting to some pounds (I forget the precise sum), was paid by the county into the City coffers. Upon such an occasion, the sheriff, attended by his satellites, appeared decked with his gold chain of office, and in his presence, the flagellation was administered. In the process of a reforming age, that huge fee attracted notice, the necessity for its payment was challenged, and, at length, the expensive ceremony was abandoned, without its disuse appearing to



have provoked a demurrer from the City authorities. It may now be altogether forgotten by the corporation, but I could name the sheriffs who thus did suit and service at Cold Bath Fields, upwards of twenty years ago.

I have already affirmed that I am no advocate for severe flagellation—indeed, extreme punishments of any kind fail in their effects. My judgment, however, convinces me that, in the instances of criminal boys, a very moderate application of the birch-rod is far preferable to confinement on bread and water. Although vast numbers of those urchins were unspeakably depraved, it ever appeared to me unnatural to visit those of tender years with the dark cells, and yet an adequate check must exist as a curb upon their unruly dispositions, which often displayed themselves in very revolting forms. As a mode of repression, I should have been satisfied with the power to administer *half-a-dozen* stripes, and I am sure that trifling amount of salutary smart would have been more effectual than days of solitary confinement. In like manner, if little thievish urchins were sure to receive, as often as detected, a



smart whipping with the birch rod, and knew they might inevitably rely upon it, the commitment to prison might be spared without the slightest detriment to public security, with a sensible curtailment of juvenile delinquencies.

Sensitive reasoners falsely argue that whipping brutalizes. Alas ! they little dream how sad and withering is the blight that falls upon the imprisoned child ; and how callous and indifferent to shame he becomes ; and how utterly imprisonment, with all its modern ameliorations, has failed to produce aught but the most discouraging effects upon the unreasoning, but impressible minds of the very young. In the resort also to county penal schools, upon the model of Mettray, the greatest care must be taken to obviate their becoming incentives to depraved parents, to consign their children to the streets in order to compass selfish objects. When the juvenile prison at Parkhurst was first instituted, and the superior condition of its inmates extorted the satirical designation of 'a seminary for young gentlemen,' I was actually importuned by the mothers of boys, frequenters of the



prison, to use my influence to procure for their sons, admission into Parkhurst. Thus, there exist evils on either hand, which demand all the acumen of judicial administrators to watch and to qualify.



## CHAPTER VI.

PLEAS OF INNOCENCE—A RARE INSTANCE OF ERRO-  
NEOUS CONVICTION.

THERE was something perfectly ludicrous in the all but universal claim to innocence on the part of convicts of all degrees. If ever an individual were found sufficiently candid to avow his fault, the rare exception would arise amongst those of superior education. But even in such a case, there would be intermingled so much qualification, that the plea of justificatory concomitance would greatly detract from the honesty of the confession. Judging, therefore, from almost unlimited asseveration, as well as from plausible pretexts of extenuation,



it would appear, *primâ facie*, that prosecutors were invariably oppressors, and the convicted, all victims.

So universally did prisoners deny their guilt, and arraign the justice of their sentences, that, at length, the every day assertion, extorted from me a remark, at which, most of the prisoners themselves would smile ; “ You are not guilty ! Well, I know that full well. I have long since discovered, that the prison was built purposely to receive innocent people. It’s always full of them ;” and, occasionally, I used to relate the well-known anecdote of the visit of the King of France to the galleys ; when the only man who confessed his crime was ordered by His Majesty to be sent away, lest he should contaminate all the innocent people around him. But whenever a prisoner of approved demeanour, consulted me (as was often the case), as to the probable efficacy of an appeal to the Home Secretary, or with a view to present any request to the visiting committee, and prefaced his address by pleading innocence, or indulged in self-complacent extenuation, I used to point out to him the prejudice he would



create, at the outset, by employing the flimsy pretext so largely vaunted, but so highly ridiculed.

It was astonishing to observe how frequently notorious thieves, poor brainless creatures, imbued only with a dash of slender cunning, would come forward to invoke my interference in their behalf, upon grounds so supremely absurd, as to proclaim at once their feeble intelligence, and weak discernment. They always took care that the testimony they quoted should be beyond the reach of reference, and the case was generally presented in something like the following form. I am about to adduce the very latest incident within my experience. "If you please, sir," was always the introduction, and in the faulty phraseology of the clique, the convict who addressed me, proceeded to say, that a 'chap,' then transported, and, of course, removed, had told my narrator's mother, when she saw him in Newgate, that he (the transported) had committed the robbery for which my relator was suffering. He hoped I would see into it, as it was "very hard to suffer innocent." The



man whose application I am citing, renewed it over and over again, asked for leave to consult me in my office repeatedly, and, at length, when positively told I would not interfere, scratched (by a permission freely accorded to all) a petition to the Secretary of State, in a handwriting scarcely legible, setting forth the foregoing veracious grounds for that high functionary's intervention. Such a demonstration as this was by no means rare; on the contrary, those fallacious tales were too common for my philosophy; and my sharp retort would unmistakeably betray my impatience, when wasting time to listen to them.

It was not always, however, possible to smile at these unprincipled pretensions, for they often displayed such unblushing hardihood, that indignation became the predominant sentiment when listening to such gross inventions. Upon one occasion, a woman, about to be discharged, who was not aware that she would undergo a parting personal search, had contrived to purloin from the laundry, in which she had been employed, as much linen as she could unsuspectingly wrap around her. The



quantity abstracted was considerable, and was discovered, by the female warders, concealed beneath her under-clothing. Thus detected, she could only shed tears and plead for mercy, and, when I repaired to the spot, she fell upon her knees, and, with uplifted hands, implored forgiveness. The robbery, however, was an audacious one, and demanded punishment; so a police constable was sent for, custody given of the delinquent, and, in due course, she was tried, convicted, and sentenced to six months' imprisonment. When this woman returned to Cold Bath Fields, under this fresh conviction, she affected an air of injured innocence, and had the effrontery to complain to me of the hardship of her case, in being punished for an offence of which she was entirely guiltless. My reproof was of a most emphatic character, and I thenceforth took care that she should be kept strictly to distasteful work, and be debarred the opportunity of again exercising her furtive dextexterity.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Prior to the above transaction, an elderly woman, named Warner, prosecuted by the county of Middlesex for a like offence, was tried by the late Lord Denman



Such is a specimen of the 'innocence' so irrationally and universally professed by criminals of almost every degree.

In the midst of such countless delusions, it is not singular that I should have listened with incredulity to a similar plea, from a quarter in which greater reliance upon meek asseverations was nothing but the speaker's due. Alas! the mind, habitually cheated and misled, was not armed with discrimination to discover the rarest grain of truth in such an overwhelming profusion of sophistication and guile.

The following history is that of a really beautiful young woman, and its perusal is calculated to awaken a combination of pain and pleasure. It is, indeed, sad to reflect that a misapprehension of suspicious circumstances, without the means at hand of correct elucidation

when Common Sergeant. On her conviction, his lordship expressed the opinion that such a crime perpetrated in such a place demanded the most exemplary punishment, and he sentenced the delinquent to two years' imprisonment with hard labour, her age only having saved her from transportation.



tion, should have wrongfully consigned a young creature, not more than twenty-two years of age, to the lingering application of penal discipline for a whole year. Yet, there is a melancholy satisfaction in reflecting that much good resulted to that unhappy girl, from the genuine charity which impels an active Christian spirit to dive into the abodes of wretchedness, and to seek the redemption even of the imprisoned outcast.

When I affirm that C. M. was really beautiful, I deal in no exaggeration ; for the judge who tried her—the late Common-Serjeant Mirehouse—quite scandalized her prosecutrix, and some lady friends who accompanied her to the court, by the apology he addressed to the jury for not transporting the trembling girl at the bar—“Gentlemen, we cannot afford to send such beauty from the country.” Her sentence, consequently, became imprisonment with hard labour, for one year.

C. M. was in the service of Mrs. N., as lady's maid to her daughter, who was at that time receiving the addresses of Captain J., of the R.N. Miss N. testified her regard for her



lover, by working or decorating cambric handkerchiefs, and other such light presents, which she most injudiciously transmitted, with occasional *billets doux*, by the hands of her pretty maid, who, on such occasions, carried them to the captain's lodgings. In time, the captain appears to have overstepped the bounds of prudence and propriety, and most reprehensibly to have cultivated such terms with his charming messenger as to lead him to present, and her to accept, a few of the small offerings which Miss N. had designed for him alone.

C. M. always emphatically insisted upon the perfect innocence of her little flirtation with Captain J., but there is quite sufficient in its outward aspect to justify reproof. However, pending his engagement with Miss N., Captain J. accepted the command of a frigate, and sailed to the coast of North America. He had not been long away, when, on some luckless occasion, Miss N., in the absence of her maid, went to the room of the latter in search of something hastily required, and, not finding what she sought, raised the lid of a box belonging to C. M., and, to her dismay, beheld,



in the possession of her maid, several of the pretty presents, worked by her own fair fingers for her lover. She ran to her mother with indignant haste, imparted to her the startling fact, and not a little aroused the fierce anger of that matron. Retribution was instantly decided upon; a police constable was called in, and, on her return, C. M. was handed over to him to undergo all the preliminary forms of law, and in due course to be arraigned at the bar of criminal justice. All this was accomplished, and the wretched girl—who could only plead, in her defence, the free gift of Captain J., without a scintilla of proof to justify her assertion—was, as I have shown, convicted, sentenced, and immured, without a voice being raised in her behalf.

There was a modest suavity in her deportment, which disposed every one in her favour, and although she spoke to me in fervid terms of her innocence, yet that plea, so incessantly made, and so little to be relied upon, met with no greater credence from her. We treated C. M. with gentle forbearance and unceasing kindness, and she repaid us by exemplary behaviour and unwearied industry.



Through some channel, the fate of the poor girl reached the ears of Captain J., absent and on duty in America; and in the agony of his remorse, he wrote to an aged baronet, Sir F. O., implored of him to see her redressed, and fully confirmed the truth of her averment. In that letter, which was brought to me by the baronet, Captain J. used every expressive term to denote his grief and self-reproach, and affirmed that he could not rest day or night from dwelling on the wrongs of that unhappy girl. The baronet, however, was one of those unimpassioned old gentlemen, who could not comprehend the Captain's anguish; he, therefore, assumed a jocular tone, and expressed himself very drily, and, as he doubtless imagined, sagely, on the casual relation between a gentleman and a pretty girl. He saw C. M., coldly asked her a few unmeaning questions, and departed, murmuring aphorisms, which resolved themselves into very common-place philosophy. Indeed, I regarded his careless demeanour, under such circumstances, as neither delicate nor generous.

The declaration of the girl herself, supported



now by the testimony of Captain J., necessarily wrought a strong impression upon my mind, and I began to regard her with deep sympathy. Still, nothing could be effected in her behalf, since in cases of conviction, founded upon sworn evidence, mere epistolary explanations could avail little. Thus, months rolled on, and the poor girl's fulfilment of her sentence, seemed inevitable. Again, however, did Captain J. strive to interest a friend in her behalf, and Captain K. (who happened to be also a personal friend of my own), brought me a letter to peruse, couched in terms more strongly descriptive of the agony with which he reflected on the girl's unmerited fate. A consultation, however, between Captain K. and myself, resulted in the conviction that we were powerless to serve her.

In process of time, the term of sentence lapsed, and C. M. was discharged with such assistance as lay within the compass of the funds at our disposal, but still, such aid was necessarily limited. Not many days after her discharge, I was informed that a lady desired to see me, and a person entered the office so



deeply veiled that it was impossible to discern her features. The stranger, however, upraised her veil, and there stood C. M., gently attired, her hair disposed in ringlets, and her fine features seen to an advantage which the prison costume had little favoured.

With tears she besought my advice and assistance, described her lack of friends, relatives, or pecuniary resources, and avowed her anxious desire to be saved from the ruin that seemed to menace her. Moved by her earnest solicitation, I recommended her to fly for counsel and assistance to a Samaritan lady, whom she had known as a prison visitor. I furnished her with the address, to which she forthwith repaired; and, finding there a willing ear and Christian sympathy, C. M. entered an asylum exactly suited to her condition, under the auspices of that kind patroness, from whence she was soon transferred to a family, to whose members the history of her severe afflictions had been confided.

The last accounts of her were all that could be wished; most creditable to her character, and hopeful as to her future welfare. Whether



Captain J. was ever able to indemnify her for the sufferings which his thoughtless levity had entailed upon her, I could never learn, although I casually heard that the incidents of that catastrophe severed his engagement with Miss N. Here, at least, was one case of genuine innocence, out of the many thousands falsely alleged.

Not only, however, were prisoners habitually prone to deny their guilt, but many of them were wont falsely to lay claim to superior connections, and even to refined education. It was by no means an unfrequent requirement, that I should prepare details setting forth the education of our inmates, in order to illustrate the prevailing impression, that criminality resulted from neglect of teaching. Upon one such occasion I directed the chief warder to visit the yards at a meal hour, ask various specific questions, and collect the numbers under each given category. The first step in the inquiry was to require all to stand up who had been classically educated; and eight male prisoners claimed to have enjoyed that advantage. As it was unwise ever to take for



granted the mere declarations of our subjects, we used to institute some sort of tests of their fidelity, and in this instance, a very superficial examination disclosed the fact, that only *one* of the eight had any acquaintance whatever with a single classical author.

Amongst the number of *professors* was a tall handsome young man, who, under the assumed name of the 'Honourable Mr. Talbot,' had swindled many tradesmen out of their property. He had been tried and convicted in the name of Talbot, to which he had thought proper to adhere, and as he had proved most troublesome to me, by his unsteady conduct, I had become rather too familiar with the name. When, therefore, I was informed of Talbot's classical pretensions, I became vastly surprised, and summoned him to my office forthwith, when the following amusing scene occurred.

"Well, Mr. Talbot," I said to him, "so I find you are a classical scholar."

"Yes, sir," was the immediate reply.

"Pray, what authors have you read?"

"Most of the Latin and Greek authors."

"Will you name some of them?"



“Why, sir, it is so long since, that I have quite forgotten their names.”

“Have you read Ovid, or Virgil?”

“Virgil, sir.”

“Will you repeat the first line?”

“Why, really sir, it is so long ago, that I have quite forgotten it.”

Of course I began to more than surmise the imposition he was practising, but in order to test the fellow's impudence, I continued the farce of putting questions, to all of which, without the remotest embarrassment, he made the same reply—“Why, really sir, it is so long ago, that I have quite forgotten.”

At length I asked him what grammar he had used, and, as coolly as before, he gave me the same answer. I was too much amused to be angry, but I could not fail to perceive, by that unblushing hardihood, with what an imperturbable countenance that young schemer would, in the perpetration of his frauds, confront his dupes, the tradesmen whom he was wont to plunder.

A ludicrous claim to gentility was once put forth by an old beggar woman, committed



under the Vagrant Act. She had been reported, while seated with a numerous class at breakfast, for her generally disobedient behaviour, and I bestowed upon her a passing reproof that nettled and enraged her, when, jumping up, and putting her arms akimbo, she looked me arrogantly in the face, and shouted, in a shrill voice—"I'm a gentlewoman! My father wasn't governor of a gaol, he was governor of the West Indies!" The scene was so comical, that I, the female warders, and the prisoners burst into a fit of irrepressible laughter; and the old woman, on seeing the mirth she had occasioned, recovered her temper, and laughed too. From that time forth, she could not forbear to smile whenever she saw me, and seemed to receive as a good joke my remark, that "I had no notion of the high rank of some people in the prison."

On my retirement from the post of governor, I left behind me a felon, who had sought to gain favour by the assumption of academical pretensions. Having asked permission to speak to me apart, he said, with a very earnest countenance, as he looked down



upon the felon's costume—"Cannot I have same other dress than this, sir? It is hard for a gentleman, who has been a fellow-commoner of Trinity College, Cambridge, to be thus disgracefully clothed." The felon garb consisted of a grey suit, with the number of the convict, painted on a square yellow ground, attached both to the arm and back. The man had a dark and rather intellectual countenance, and, at first, I put faith in his statement. To my inquiries as to who was the master, and who the tutor, he answered without hesitation; and to other questions he replied he had not graduated, having only kept three terms. I inquired if he were a good classic? He was sorry to say, far from it; and a series of short interrogatories unmasked his pretensions, and proved him to be no less a cheat than the classical Talbot. Not long afterwards he confessed to the deception he had attempted to practice, but said his statement was not altogether false, since *he had been* in Trinity College, but in the quality of a *servant* to a fellow-commoner.

The ensuing singular relation will exhibit



an opposite trait of character, namely, that of an uneducated young woman, rejecting every notion of her possible emergence from a state of crime, and appearing to revel in the conviction that she was so steeped in shame and dishonour, as to render extrication an event utterly beyond all human hope and expectation. E. L., aged about twenty-six years, was of short stature and slender form, possessed small, bright and intelligent features, and was capable, at will, of assuming a perfectly ladylike deportment. She was imprisoned for felony, and had been frequently brought under my notice for persevering misconduct; and, on such occasions, in reply to my remonstrance, she asked me, with a look betokening the brightest intelligence, how I expected *she* could ever rise from the degradation into which she had sunk. She averred the thing to be *impossible*! Struck by the energy of her manner, and the intellectual flash that lighted up her eyes, I inquired into her history, and received from her own lips the following strange relation. First, however, I could not fail to discover that she was



a woman of good education, and she professed in the outset, to have been reared a gentlewoman. She spoke French fluently, and with a pure Parisian accent. According to her own account, she had married, at a very early age, a Frenchman of good station and fortune, with whom she had lived happily, in Paris, for nine years, until, in an evil hour, she saw and became attached to a young Englishman, of ample means, with whom she eloped from her husband. She described her seducer with great enthusiasm, and emphatically declared that the happiness she had enjoyed with him, during ten months, would, in her own terms, 'compensate for an eternity of misery.'

He brought her to England, and introduced her to a friend of his, who also kept a mistress, and the four resided together in elegant lodgings in Bury Street, St. James's. She had at her command, she said, at that time, abundant means in money, a profusion of jewellery, and the most ample fashionable wardrobe. In short, she revelled in luxury. At length, however, the peace of herself and her female companion was disturbed by the nightly



absence of their lords ; and, by some means, the two neglected women ascertained that those gentlemen had become the frequenters of a house of equivocal reputation, in the same street. They, consequently, sought out and bribed the mistress of the house to admit them, in order that they might unexpectedly confront their faithless swains ; and that project they put in execution. E. L's protector became so exasperated at this interference with his free action, that he quitted her instantly, and she saw him no more. She waited for days in anxious expectation of his return ; but no sooner did she become convinced that she was indisputably abandoned, than rage and despair took possession of her mind, and she proceeded to act with prompt desperation.

She threw off all but the most indispensable clothing, she spurned, and cast aside the jewels she had worn, she dashed her money on the floor, and, with a bare sufficiency for the most pressing want, she rushed wildly into the street, and, seeking a public-house, drank, at one draught, such a quantity of brandy as to become completely insensible. How long she



remained in that state, she knew not; but, when she regained her consciousness, she found herself the inmate of a hospital, and reduced to the weakest condition.

As she became convalescent, she contracted, by some means, an acquaintance with a German, whose calling was that of a shoemaker. He, also, had been an inmate of the hospital, and extended to her, when weak and dejected, so much sympathy and kindness, that gratitude, she said, attached her to that man, and at length they conjointly occupied a single room, the lodging in which he pursued his humble craft. He was addicted to drink, and smoked incessantly, and so lost had she become to feminine propriety, that she copied his vices, and nightly accompanied him to the tap-room of a public-house, where she joined in the prevailing drunkenness, and listened, without shame, to the vile ribaldry of the frequenters of that low resort. Often, she affirmed, had she seen men take off their small clothes, and send them to be pawned or sold, and sit without them to consume the proceeds in more drink.



All this time she felt a sort of demoniacal pleasure in thus revenging herself for the sudden blight of her unhallowed, but deep-rooted affections. Poverty necessarily attended such a course, and then she resorted to theft, which had twice brought her to that prison.

When I asked her if an appeal to her husband at Paris would be likely to prove effectual, she replied, with indescribable emotion, that she was sure there was not a fault in her that her husband would not pardon, nor a sacrifice for her sake he would not make. But no ! Her debasement, she affirmed, was too great for redemption ; she was lost body and soul irremediably, and seemed almost to glory in her ruin. Here is an example, as rare as fearful, of a mind of remarkable structure, capable of only one absorbing passion, and equal to the abandonment of earthly and heavenly hopes to gratify a sentiment of indefinable desperation. E. L. left that prison, and I heard of her thereafter as an habitual drunkard, and a daily increasing reprobate.



## CHAPTER VII.

INVETERATE IMPOSTORS WHO ABUSE PUBLIC SYMPATHY,  
AND OTHER STRANGE DEPREDATORS.

IN my early pages, I have asserted how hapless and unremunerative is the vocation of a common thief, and the same remark extends to the ultimate inevitable destitution of the most plausible and practiced cheats. The latter class, however, do at times contrive to extract from the credulity of the wealthy and charitable an amount of profit that would hardly be credited. Happily, however, for the interests of industry and probity, adventurous reprobates are never satisfied with such



unhoped-for success, but dissipate freely what they gain easily ; and, moreover, they never can altogether elude the vigilance of the police, but are recognised when they least expect detection, and the most cautious adepts undergo reiterated imprisonments.

One of those arch imposters was a young man, who assumed the name of 'Charles Morley,' and occasionally that of 'Page.' He had been a frequent inmate of Cold Bath Fields, on summary conviction, and had also suffered one year's imprisonment, with hard labour, under a clause of the Vagrant Act, which empowers a court of session to inflict that term upon those whose antecedent impositions entitle them to the designation of 'incorrigible rogues'—a name perfectly befitting Charles Morley. His peculiar deception was that of personating a deaf and dumb unfortunate ; and he was, it was said, an accomplished simulator, but with an expression of countenance easily recognisable, and hence the danger to his undisturbed success.

Upon one occasion he had pursued his craft with unexampled ability, and was gathering



an ample recompense, when he was suddenly recognized and hurried off to the police court, where the recital of his arts created a sensation, and the newspapers, on the following morning, made a lengthened exposure of his wiles. In the prison he had been scarcely clothed in his usual costume, and drafted off to his appropriate class, when I was informed that a footman in the royal livery was at the gate, and desirous to speak to me. He proved to be the bearer of the compliments, to the governor, of his late Royal Highness the Duke of Gloucester, who, having seen the newspaper account of Charles Morley, became suddenly impressed with the conviction that his credulity had been imposed upon, and he requested that his footman might be permitted to see the prisoner and resolve the suspicion.

The royal servant proceeded to inform me that Charles Morley (who, when seen was promptly identified), had gained access to his H.R.H., and had by his artifices so excited the philanthropy of the Royal Duke, that he not only gave him a handsome sum from his own purse, but took the trouble to collect sub-



scriptions from the royal family, and others of his personal friends, and actually realized, and handed to that arrant knave upwards of £20 in ready money. The footman bore testimony to the sympathy which had moved the whole household to contribute, and seemed to feel acutely the worthless end to which so much kindness and cash had been devoted. He departed bewailing the vexatious intelligence he had to convey to the benevolent duke, while the impostor hung his head, and really looked as though he were ashamed of his rascality—a proof that, in prison as well as without its walls, he could promptly assume the guise best suited to the occasion.

Charley Morley, *alias* Page, at length bore all the external indications of a drunkard, and having met with an injury to the hand, which his habits greatly aggravated, he had, after acute suffering, to submit to its amputation. He last came under my observation as a man still young, broken in health, and maimed in body, the results of habits which threatened to cut short his days, and consign him to a premature grave, with all the infamy of his mis-



deeds, and turpitude of his frauds to answer for hereafter.

That moral is still further exemplified by the case of a man named Underwood, whose countenance also bore evidence to his habits of inebriety, and who died in Cold Bath Fields prison. He had been one of the most successful of the clique of begging-letter impostors, and, at one time, kept a horse and gig, traversed various parts of England, and, personifying a clergyman of the established church, levied contributions upon noblemen, and men of wealth, by specious tales which his assumed character served so well to favour. I received from one of the most active of the Mendicity Society's officers, many details of his remarkable impositions; and in Underwood's later moments, when his spirit was subdued, and his heart surcharged with remorse, he acknowledged with penitence his numerous frauds, and expressed to me, personally, the grief with which he contemplated his past iniquity.

As a pseudo-clergyman, the bearer of a tale of harrowing distress, he so aroused the pity



of the late Earl F——, that he handed the scoundrel £50, and when the imposture transpired, the noble earl was so indignant, that he became transformed from a liberal and confiding man, to the most hesitating and suspicious contributor, whenever his after-charity was invoked. At least, so averred my informant, the mendicity officer.

But the crowning duplicity of Underwood's tactics, was displayed in the following manner. He was accustomed to visit Greenwich Park, and there to court the conversation of the pensioners, who limped about the hill. He would extract from them the names of men-of-war in which they had served, carefully note the designations of the captains and officers, and collect any other information likely to bolster up a deceptive narrative.

Upon one such roguish expedition, Underwood had drawn from an unsuspecting veteran, that in a given year he had sailed in a frigate which conveyed the Marquis of B—— to Malta. The captain's name was duly registered, and (as my mendicity relator informed me), the first-lieutenant was named Pennell. Fur-



nished with these facts, Underwood wrote to the noble marquis from Maidstone, recalled to his recollection the ship, &c., and assumed to be the bygone shipmate of his lordship, whom he hoped the marquis had not altogether forgotten. He declared himself to be the Lieutenant Pennell in question, stated that, having left the navy, he had experienced a succession of dire misfortunes, that he was then immersed in poverty and affliction, having several daughters to share his distress, who were struggling to support him and themselves by needlework. A sudden conviction, he averred, had seized his mind, that could his lordship be made aware of his penury, he would not be indisposed to lighten the burthen of a misery which was pressing him down to the grave. He implored in earnest terms some assistance, and begged that it might be addressed to 'Lieutenant Pennell, Post-office, Maidstone.'

On the receipt of that letter, the noble marquis at once recalled the memory of his quondam-shipmate, and believing the writer to be the identical person, grieved over his reduced condition, and in order to relieve



it, forthwith generously enclosed a £50 note to the given address. He declared the joy it gave him to be able to alleviate the sufferings of a gallant officer in adversity, whom he so well remembered under happier auspices, and begged to be informed how he might be able to advance the permanent interests of the lieutenant and his family.

Underwood was not slow to avail himself of that benevolent suggestion, and intimated in reply that the sum of £150 would enable him to establish his daughters (who were, he affirmed, proficient in millinery and dress-making), in an eligible business, and thus at once rescue the whole family from the privations under which they had so cruelly suffered. The generous marquis instantly resolved to transmit the required amount, and was about to enclose it, when a sudden caution assailed his mind, and suggested to him that it might be prudent to send the money to the parochial clergyman, and solicit his kindly co-operation. The minister was, consequently, requested to seek out Lieutenant Pennell, observe the position of the family, deliver to them the money,



and counsel them as to its advantageous outlay.

The clergyman, of course, gladly resolved to extend his services in so good a cause; and, furnished with the marquis's munificent remittance, made inquiries concerning Lieut. Pennell, and soon found that no one in Maidstone had any knowledge whatever of such an individual. With the exception of the delivery at the post-office, on the demand of an unknown applicant, of a letter in that name, nothing further indicated the existence of any person so called. Suspicions being now awakened, the constabulary was set to work, and the impostor was soon tracked to his lodging; but, perceiving the approach of persons whose object he was prompt to divine, Underwood precipitately bolted out of a back window, thence over a wall, and got safely away; not, however, without leaving behind him a table bestrewed with letters which exposed the nature of his villanous operations. The £150 were safe from his clutches, and Maidstone became happily rid of so dangerous a presence.



Within two years of my retirement, I had the custody of a man who was of a most respectable family, had received the education of a gentleman, and inherited a reputable landed property. He was imprisoned in his own name, P——, and was one of those unhappy beings whose life had been a series of flagitious misdeeds. He had sold his patrimony, squandered the proceeds in riot and debauchery, first importuned and then menaced his relatives, in order to extort money ; and, after earning, by his acts, the character of an untameable ruffian, he enlisted in the 44th Regiment, and went with it to India. Returning to England, and discharged from the army, he became the terror of his respectable mother, whom he would waylay in her walks in revolting disguises ; and his brutality towards that aged lady proclaimed him to be devoid of natural affection, and a stranger to common humanity.

His offence was of a nature to elicit, perhaps, the commendation of the multitude, since he selected for the objects of his impositions *solicitors*—a class of men who might be natu-



rally esteemed too astute for the chicanery of an artful knave. However, singular as the fact may be, he had inveigled several of that shrewd profession into the belief that he was the expectant of valuable possessions; and he was then imprisoned for just such a fraudulent negociation, whereby he had secured the advance of a sum of money. His name, his respectable connexions, and the unquestionable solidity of the family's property, doubtless gave colour to those inventions; but we, in the prison, had acquired the reliable information, that not one shilling of money or stick of property was his, by existing right, or by future expectancy.

He was a tall, dark-looking man, about forty years of age, and was an unadulterated compound of duplicity and falsehood. He was occasionally visited by his wife, a pretty little creature, who was burthened with an infant; and we found he had secured her confidence by the most delusive representations, and had strung together a tissue of fables as to his means and expectations, from which she awoke to find herself a dupe and a beggar.



At the moment of his imprisonment, there chanced to be a captain in the 44th Regiment of P.'s name, and I was soon informed that my prisoner had, before his disgrace, been in the distinguished position of a captain. I could not, on hearing such a statement, fail to feel interested; and, consequently, I sought out the man, whom I found in the infirmary, and at that moment without his cap. To my inquiry if he had really been a captain in the army, he instantly stood 'attention,' and, raising his hand with military formality to his *bare head*, answered, "Yes, sir, in the 44th Regiment." I forthwith detected the imposture; for no officer of the army would, under any circumstances, resort to such a mode of salutation—and I told him, at once, I did not believe him. Thereupon, he began to asseverate, and employed the choicest vows to fortify his assertions. In time, however, his deep-rooted knavery and utter truthlessness became so unmistakeably apparent, that not one syllable he uttered was believed; and it was impossible not to look with a mixture of surprise and pity upon a nature so unworthily degene-



rate. Station, education, patrimonial advantages, had all succumbed to inborn baseness of character, until the wretched practitioner of every species of dissimulation—bit by bit defeating its own purposes—found himself with utterly exhausted means, a convicted swindler and cheat, and—even in that sad extremity—a despicable liar.

In general, persons who pursued dishonest practices would have female associates of a like stamp with themselves, and numerous were the instances of females committed also as ‘rogues and vagabonds.’ Those who were called upon to employ *finesse* were usually of superior external appearance, and we could not fail to observe the cool and deceptive simplicity with which they would unfold their own fabulous histories, and dilate upon the trials and necessities by which they professed to have been encompassed.

But the most remarkable female cheat within my memory, was a young and well-favoured woman, who wore a most attractive appearance, and whose schemes, indeed, were promoted by her prepossessing exterior. Her



most general name was Roberts, but like others of her class, she would adopt, when necessity required it, any other name, most likely at random. She dressed with fashionable taste, but made no tawdry display. It was her practice to frequent churches and chapels, and, after a cautious survey, to place herself near a pew, occupied by parties suitable to her design, and where there was room for another. She bore in her hand an elegantly bound prayer-book, and when admitted to a seat, seemed to be absorbed in devotion. While others, however, were intent upon prayer, she was busied in rifling their pockets, or in disengaging from their sides their chains and watches. As soon as success had crowned her efforts, a simulated sudden faintness would impel her to withdraw; but such had been her dexterity that, by these nefarious means, she had realised the largest profits ordinarily accruing to cheats and depredators. When last discharged from Cold Bath Fields, the Mrs. Adkins of that day called my attention to the extraordinary value of the articles of dress sent in to enable this trickstress to move in her accustomed style.



The shawl she estimated at twenty guineas at least, the veil was of the most costly character, and every other article of corresponding value. Indeed, Mrs. Adkins examined with envious amazement the rare assortment of finery supplied to a common thief, but I forbade their delivery to her. She had entered the prison in a dress quite suitable to her exit, and I resolved she should make no unseemly display to dazzle the attendants and prisoners, whom it was apparently her object to astound by the exhibition of her finery.

Seldom have the annals of criminal administration recorded a more remarkable specimen of systematic but unreasoning dishonesty than was disclosed in the case of a rich old gentleman, who, for the occasion, assumed the name of Sarah Collins—her real name beginning with C. and containing the same number of letters. From all the information I could acquire, her property appeared to exceed £20,000. Committed for trial for larceny, she successfully negotiated for the absence of the prosecutor, and, according to her own averment, she paid for that object £500.



Moreover, a designing friend hastened over from Ireland, on learning her apprehension, and to him also she handed £500, in due course to be accounted for ; a condition which she ultimately found it had never been his design to fulfil.

The prosecutor silenced, and all seemingly made smooth for an acquittal, her release would have ensued, but for the stern sense of justice of the late Lord Denman, then Common Sergeant. That learned judge penetrated the scheme of evasion, and resolved to defeat it. Sarah Collins was indicted for stealing lace from a shop counter, and the evidence of the policeman, whom his lordship persisted, notwithstanding the eloquence of counsel, in examining, and the production of the lace, and the officer's detail of all the circumstances, were put by his lordship to the jury with such perspicuous force, that, as he had defined the duty exacted by the oath they had taken, a verdict of ' Guilty ' necessarily ensued ; and, after an impressive address, she was sentenced to one year's imprisonment in the House of Correction. There can be no



doubt that his lordship, in that case, deserved the thanks of the country, since he had defeated the machinations of venal wealth, and had purely administered justice.

On the examination of her wardrobe, she was found to possess no under-linen. A large wash-leather garment served her for a chemise, and amply encased her frame. That unwonted article of female attire was furnished with various capacious pockets of like material, undoubtedly designed to facilitate the secretion of articles abstracted from shop counters. There was also found in her possession a memorandum-book, containing a multitude of strange hieroglyphics, together with a mass of legible addresses, all of which proved to be shops well suited to her devices. She was, in fact, a rare example of the rich and grasping miser.

Mrs. Collins had not been long under my charge ere she besought me most urgently to send for a box from her lodgings, which she averred to contain 'papers' of the utmost moment to her interests. After earnest importunities on the subject, she wrung from me



a consent; and to the prison, consequently, the box was dispatched; while the landlord who brought it, and his own bill at the same time, had to defend every item, and fight a severe battle, ere he could procure a settlement of his account. Meanwhile, I considerably allowed the examination of the 'papers,' which proved to be of a very strange character.

The female attendant, who had watched the search, beheld a weighty parcel hastily withdrawn and thrust under the garments, then the prison dress, of Mrs. Collins. All further search was forthwith relinquished, and with practicable haste the aged prisoner rushed up to the infirmary, where cold and rheumatism had caused her to be placed, while the attendant hurried to reveal her suspicions to the matron. The matron, with great promptitude, sent for me, when, lo! those important 'papers' proved to be a sum of money, consisting of notes, much gold, and a quantity of silver amounting in the whole, to upwards of £2,640.

The scene that ensued was perfectly drama-



tic. The horror of the miser, at the dread of losing her treasure—the passionate appeals to me to preserve it for her—the stealthy approach towards me, and the stifled whisper—“Take what you like for yourself, but spare me some of it! Don’t let it go to the government!”—all indicated intense excitement. She had learned that a conviction of even a trifling felony (that cruel remnant of a barbarous law) involved forfeiture of personal property, and she was in an agony of alarm and agitation. I paid, as by statute required, to Sir Chapman Marshall, who was then sheriff, the entire amount of the capture; and thus the treasure appeared to be finally disposed of, and the affair subsided.

The newspapers had circulated—perhaps, exaggerated—Mrs. Collins’s wealth; and, some weeks after the above transaction, a letter came addressed to her, impressed with a seal in which the ‘blood-red hand’ was discernible. The writer was doubtless ignorant that all letters addressed to prisoners were inspected by the authorities. I, of course, opened this, and found it to be an offer of marriage from a



*baronet*, who complacently reasoned that a change of name alone could expunge the taint and dishonour of so dire an incident. In offering his own hand, I was particularly struck with the undertaking to 'introduce her to his daughters, who would vie with him in making her home happy.'

With the letter in my hand, I sought out Mrs. Collins, and, presenting it to her, said, smilingly—"There, Mrs. Collins, is an offer of marriage for *you*!" "For *me*, sir!" she exclaimed with her usual strong Irish accent, and, seizing the letter, read a few lines—and, muttering some contemptuous words, she indignantly cast it into the fire, seemingly enraged at the temerity of the writer. There was something in the poor old woman's scornful energy that awakened in my mind an involuntary passing respect for her; and I thought that, notwithstanding her avarice and dishonesty, there still remained in her mind some slight consciousness of dignity, which this singular proposition had so suddenly tended to evoke.

I full well remember the name of that titled



aspirant, but I have never revealed it. First, I conceived that it had come to my knowledge sanctified by official confidence, and secondly, I learned, upon enquiry, that a speculation, not deserving to be styled rash, had immersed that gentleman in pecuniary embarrassments.

At length Mrs. Collins's imprisonment lapsed, and she must needs emerge from her prison abode. The world would surmise that gladly would the aged gentlewoman have sought again a home adapted to her condition and circumstances. Not so, however. The day was wet and cold, and a slight delay under the hope of improving weather was not unnatural ; when, therefore, she requested to be allowed to linger for an hour or two, I at once assented, but when, on the pretence of the rain, which continued to fall, she sought to remain till the morrow, I resolutely forbade it. I knew that a penurious spirit influenced her selection, and that a desire to save a trifle from her ample funds induced the request. I sent her word that as she had abundant means to secure a lodging, or repair to an hotel, go from the prison she must ; and go, therefore, she did.



## CHAPTER VIII.

CHRISTIAN CHARITY EXTENDED TO PRISONERS—THEIR  
DISREGARD OF PROFFERED BENEFITS—OPPOSITION  
IN A STRANGE QUARTER—QUALITIES OF THE MA-  
GISTRACY.

It is one of the noble features in the conduct of the thoughtful rich, to take a zealous interest in the welfare of the poor, and not to despise even the criminal and outcast. In emulation of the generous example of that gifted woman, Mrs. Fry, numerous benevolent ladies, acting in concert, and individually zealous, extended as I have before observed, the most pains-taking personal devotion to instruct and to reclaim the vicious of their own sex.



The righteous design to disenthral from the shackles of vice a few of its enslaved daughters, induced Miss Burdett Coutts to volunteer her liberal aid in so good a cause. She only once visited the prison at Cold Bath Fields, but she had, by that time, munificently contributed funds, and had taken an active personal direction in the establishment of a 'home' at Shepherd's Bush, as a primary experiment to test the practicability of withdrawing from vice, training into a right direction, and assisting to emigrate, a few of the outcast sisterhood. For that purpose, Miss Coutts had sought an introduction to me, in order that my experience might guide her in a selection of objects, and, through Mr. Charles Dickens, I had the happiness to aid that kind and charitable lady in her beneficent undertaking.

Here, then, I derived some new light into the blind infatuation which impeded the corrigibility of the 'unfortunate' class. Although I had daily access to, at the lowest computation, 150 of those frail and suffering creatures within the prison walls, and was authorized to seek out eligible (I mean in



point of penitential disposition) unfortunates from other quarters, I soon found the impracticability of winning many over to accept so great a boon. Objections would be raised, conditions critically sifted, and disdainful rejections of the offer would ensue too frequently to prove encouraging to my mission. Some would appear gratefully to assent, but as their enlargement approached, a change of mind would arise, and some plausible pretext be advanced to give colour to the ultimate refusal. I even applied to a very intelligent inspector of police—whose duty led him into a neighbourhood suitable to the proposition—and he readily consented to extend his assistance. At length, however, he was compelled to proclaim the utter failure of his efforts, since he found all to shrink from the irksomeness of quiet domesticity, and the prospect of expatriation. However, I succeeded in making a, perhaps, second-class selection, approved, after a personal examination into their frame of mind and general fitness by Mr. Dickens, aided by the matron and myself; and these were, at length, submitted to Miss Coutts, who was



always benignly disposed to encourage the least sign of hopeful penitence, especially in the young. That excellent lady had good cause to be satisfied with her charitable labours, for ample was the confirmation, from various colonies, of the creditable conduct of, I think I may safely aver, all her *protégées*. Strange to say, my good offices in that merciful object were impeded by a late magistrate, who perversely insisted (as was by cynical interpretation literally too true) that Miss Coutts had no right to confer with prisoners within those walls, nor was it 'to be tolerated that Mr. Charles Dickens should walk into the prison whenever he pleased.'

When the late Mr. Benjamin Rotch, the magistrate in question, had delivered that philippic, a humorous rejoinder ensued on the part of another magistrate, who could boast of a more gracious spirit. In the course of his declamation, Mr. Rotch attempted, with much asperity, to depreciate the writings of Mr. Dickens, and quoted a work on prisons, by a *Mr. Adshead*, a rabid separatist, and, making that citation, Mr. Rotch caustically exclaimed,



“Mr. Dickens, whose statements on the prisons of America have been blown to the four winds of heaven, by the work of Mr. Adshead!” “Certainly,” exclaimed the more genial magistrate, “Mr. Dickens’ name is miserably obscure, and his writings are scarcely known; but the *immortal Adshead* is of a different stamp, and his writings have a world-wide reputation.” The rebuke told forcibly.

Having mentioned an incident which might be misconstrued into an attack upon the magisterial body, I deem it but just to record my experience and impression as to the bench generally.

In recurring to magisterial superintendence during the extended period of my subsidiary services, I could, undoubtedly (as most of them were, at the period of my retirement, fully aware), complain of wrongs, and, in one memorable instance, of grievous and lengthened persecution; but it would neither tend to the edification of the public, nor comport with a calm and dispassionate treatment of a useful and interesting subject, to crowd these pages with incidents of a purely personal character.



I therefore abstain—first, in deference to the reason just adduced; and, secondly, because I entertain for the aggregate body of justices an unaffected respect.

In their collective capacity, the magistrates of Middlesex have, throughout my experience, been distinguished for kindly consideration, forbearance, impartiality, and a sterling sense of justice. They have presented a fair average specimen of education and ability, while very many of them have been remarkable for intellectual vigour. In a body so numerous, some few may naturally be expected (as in other classes of society) to have displayed exceptive qualities, and to have been the very reverse of what I have just affirmed; and from that trifling minority the county officers have too often experienced treatment more or less vexatious and ungenerous. So soon, however, as the court—*i. e.*, the aggregate magisterial assemblage—obtained cognizance of any acts or proceedings of an unjust or aggressive nature against their public servants, high or low, and such matters assumed the requisite form to be dealt with in session, than the manly advocacy



of the oppressed, and, above all, the crowning majority on a division, would nobly vindicate the magnanimity of the bench. I could cite various proofs to establish that undoubted fact, and have, in my own individual case, gratefully to acknowledge the almost unanimous vote whereby I triumphed over a series of persecutions, as invidious and implacable as ever disappointed machinations had caused to be levelled against a public officer. I did not appear ostensibly to be involved in the issue, but, in reality, a justification of my management was intimately connected with it, and I was, by the issue, secured from further attack. Reliance might always safely be reposed in the candour and spirit of justice which predominated in that court. In the dispensation of the prison regulations, the magistrates were invariably disposed to deal leniently with offenders. An excess of mercy was with them a fault; and I, who had hourly to bear with perversity, and often with outrage, could not, in my heart, applaud the prevailing tendency to pardon; or, if punishment must needs ensue, to reduce it to a minimum.



Having said thus much in commendation of the general body, truth compels me to confess that the principal prison officers were exposed to ceaseless perplexity and discomfort by the restless, agitating, and, in some instances, malevolent dispositions of one or two intemperate men. I know that it would be unjust to aver that such a trait was peculiar to the magistracy only, because general experience maintains that such intrusive meddlers are to be found in most embodied assemblies ; but with us, it always appeared to me that sufficient restraint was not imposed by the rest upon the mischievous interference of a noisy and designing man. An indisposition to dispute and contend was most probably one cause of such abstinence, for intriguing men are mostly active and persevering ; while the avowed maxim of the bench, *inter pares non est potestas*, seemed to imply a liberty of action on the part of an individual magistrate, not to be curtailed or suppressed by one or all of his fellows in a committee. Consequently, our equanimity was disturbed, nay, the very peace of our lives would be poisoned,



by the strange and unaccountable views of some one busy and intemperate individual.

A very remarkable illustration of the preceding remarks arose in the year 1846. I am about to speak of a magistrate since deceased, and am liable to be met by the charitable adage *de mortuis nil nisi bonum*, a maxim which in private life may fitly be urged, but which in matters of public significance, if stringently applied, would tend to silence or extinguish history. I deem myself, therefore, at perfect liberty to record the extraordinary course pursued, for ostensible public purposes, by a man, who, to say the least, would resort to any wily expedient to attain his own ends.

The career of the late Mr. Benjamin Rotch was strangely chequered by the multiplicity of his projects, and the manifold phases of his speculations, and as he generally contrived to embroil himself, his public life was marked by an unusual amount of contention, and may be said to have been one of ceaseless strife. He had, however, rendered himself unenviably conspicuous by a step which necessitated his



retirement from the chair of the court, to which he had been elevated on the secession of the late Mr. Marriott. As chairman of the session of the *peace*, he had challenged to hostile conflict the Lord Mayor of London (Winchester), who, instead of appointing a meeting, moved for a criminal information against his adversary.

At length, after testing a succession of strange enterprises, Mr. Rotch became infatuated in his zeal for teetotalism, frequently took the chair at meetings to promote it, and lectured in public in commendation of its principles. His fervour in that cause led him actually to determine that the largest prison in the kingdom, Cold Bath Fields, should be distinguished by that anchorite rule, and with preliminary wariness, he adopted a mild and almost deferential tone towards the chaplains and myself, to procure, as he himself professed, our 'sanction' to his delivering lectures to the prisoners on the evils of intemperance, and the efficacy of total abstinence. His proposition was advanced with so much courtesy and suavity, that no suspicion lurked in our minds as to his



ulterior designs, and his first lecture was inaugurated by the attendance of myself and various disciplinary officers, and, by his express desire, was delivered to the morally worst class the prison then contained.

Mr. Rotch was gifted with rare natural eloquence, and his lecture was not only effectively delivered, but it was pleasingly diversified by appropriate anecdotes. Towards the prisoners he repudiated any authority to demand their adhesion to his views, appealed solely to their reason, and even left any of them at liberty to withdraw, in case they should find his address distasteful. Not one, however, retired, but all listened to him with rapt attention.

The class consisted of upwards of eighty, all of whom were what is termed 'common thieves.' To those poor ignorant listeners, Mr. Rotch finally professed his readiness to administer the pledge—to all, indeed, who were convinced by his reasoning, and might be thereafter desirous to lead a life of sobriety. All volunteers to adopt the pledge were requested to stand up, and to the dismay of Mr.



Rotch, and the amusement of those who witnessed the scene, all jumped up with *empressement*, except three. The farce of that general response to so novel a proposition—and, moreover, considering the dissipated habits of such evanescent votaries—was too much, even for Mr. Rotch's equanimity, and he became unutterably abashed. He confessed to me his chagrin, at a demonstration which portended so little sincerity, but even he could not withhold his admiration of the honesty of the three demurring thieves, who candidly avowed they would not consent to take a pledge, which they full well knew they should never be able to observe.

The first step having been thus accomplished, Mr. Rotch soon extended his lectures to other classes, and, in compliance with his desire, I was present at their delivery, until I discovered that the anecdotes which embellished his discourses assumed, with every fresh relation, a new phase; and noting, perforce, this unsatisfactory variation in the details of professed facts, I became convinced they were not real occurrences, but simply interesting fictions. I



consequently withdrew my attendance by degrees, and at length abstained altogether from lending an ear to the endless repetitions in the theme itself, and to the altered form of reiterated fables. The last lecture which I attended was one addressed to the females, and the ensuing illustration of the fatal influence of intoxication was pronounced. I give the quotation, as nearly as I can possibly remember it, verbatim, and I pledge my word that I deal in no exaggeration. "When I was travelling in India," said the lecturer, "I met a tribe of 40,000 Indians (such were the identical terms). Erect and stalwart were the men, with the fire of warriors in their eye, and the development of physical prowess in the frame. After an absence of some six or eight months, on my return I again encountered the same tribe—but, alas! what a change was there. The 40,000 had been reduced to 4,000, and the remnant were a weak and emaciated set of objects. When I came to enquire what fatal scourge had worked so shocking a mortality, I was told the *fire-water* of the white man had caused that appalling wreck."



Another strange and egotistical recital also graced that day's eloquence, and the two romances wrought the final consummation of my progressive incredulity.

So far as I could discern, there was scarcely a magistrate who did not disapprove of this unusual departure from the legitimate functions of a visiting justice; but Mr. Rotch was a man with whom a rupture might beget unappeasable acrimony, and nothing was done to arrest his innovations. A vast effort continued, therefore, to be made to extend conversions to teetotalism, and the adhesion and co-operation of the prison officers were next invoked. All adherents were eulogized and exalted, and all disclaimers were depreciated and traduced. Many a weak and servile functionary became an expectant convert, while those of manlier mind rejected all such overtures, until at length a painful schism pervaded the establishment, and a social war raged between the conflicting warders, which received an impetus from countenance elsewhere.

Hostilities were proclaimed against porter, and the evening in-staying guard was con-



strained to accept coffee as a substitute. The gate warder was removed from his post to avert the intrusion of beer, and a *professing* convert to teetotalism was advanced to that post over the heads of upwards of sixty men, his seniors in standing, and unquestionably his superiors in qualification. In short, disorganization prevailed, espionage was encouraged, and idle rumours, baseless charges, and mock abuses, constituted grounds for vexatious investigations, until that enormous establishment was rent by complicated intrigues, by internal broils, and by a state of anarchy which threatened to derange the whole machinery of its discipline.

In the midst of all this turmoil, one would scarcely fail to marvel at Mr. Rotch's rare indefatigability (worthy, indeed, of a better cause), for he was at the prison gate, day after day, shortly after six in the morning, and would continue taking notes and administering pledges for successive hours. No sooner had a prisoner subscribed to teetotalism, than he easily convinced Mr. Rotch of his 'innocence.' I need hardly say that my very long experience



of such slippery characters as Mr. Rotch was prompt to confide in, enabled me more reliably to appreciate their claims to innocence, and I was not a little amused at his egregious faith in the flimsy pretensions I have before exposed.

At length, in his converse with these men, he seemed to be absolutely bereft of ordinary penetration, for he proceeded to hold out the hope of pardon to many under long sentences, who might be disposed to emigrate to Australia, and there engage in the vocation of shepherds. He became, seemingly, altogether unmindful that amongst the multitudes actually under sentence of transportation, the government had the widest field for choice, if a selection for such a purpose should be deemed desirable, without the needless extension of the mercy of the Crown to enhance the difficulty of assignment, by enlarging such as were adjudged to imprisonment only. However, under this newly-promised dispensation, Mr. Rotch professed to give instruction in sheep-shearing; and, one obscure morning, a butcher's man arrived, bearing an order in his hand, and a



live sheep on his shoulders ; and forthwith, in a small dark room, by the feeble light of a tallow candle, was Mr. Rotch, surrounded by a class of felons—would-be shepherds—and there he caused the trembling animal to be sheared for the edification of the class.

I duly inserted in my journal a note of that strange introduction and its purpose ; and thus so singular a manœuvre transpired, and was hailed with all but universal ridicule. It invited the gibes of a weekly newspaper, and the ordinary hebdomadal newsvenders' programme circulated throughout the metropolis the doings of "Drinkwater Rotch, the Sheep-shearing Magistrate," in large type. Throughout all these disturbing incidents, I had to endure every species of obloquy and contumely. I was well sustained by a decided majority of the visiting committee, against which Mr. Rotch's machinations were forced, by degrees, to recede. At length he received his final *coup de grace* by the dignified rebuke of a magistrate, now an M.P., whose influence was the result of position, worth, and talents combined. I can never forget that gentle but



crushing reproof, which seemed forthwith to fire up the whole committee; and thus the earnest protest of a gentleman defeated the warped imagination and puerile designs which had marked the speculations of an erratic mind.

The court confirmed that censure by refusing to re-elect Mr. Rotch to be a visiting justice. In due time, a characteristic delinquency caused the removal of the intrusive *soi-disant* teetotal gate-warder. The temporary prohibition against porter was rescinded; teetotalism, and its lecturing warders (made public spouters by Mr. Rotch) fell into gradual contempt; worth and efficiency in prison officers, eclipsed the transient influence of mere water-drinkers; unanimity once more prevailed; and all the past machinery of discord, *espionage*, irritation, and pledge administration, vanished; Mr. Rotch, ill able to disguise his supreme mortification, omitted no opportunity to disparage Cold Bath Fields; and at length gave vent to his resentment, in open court, by denouncing the blindness of the Home Office in declining



to sanction the transformation of English felons into Australian shepherds, or, mayhap, into bushrangers ; and thus terminated a protracted hubbub, which ultimately resolved itself into much ado about nothing.

Moreover, in the course of all that senseless agitation, Mr. Rotch was concocting another notable scheme—viz., the presentment in the Sessional Court of the unsuitableness of the prison of Cold Bath Fields, with a view to its demolition, and the erection in its place of an entirely new structure. I unhesitatingly defended the present structure, and pointed out the practicability of its extension. The scowling brow of the enraged justice imparted to me his ill-suppressed indignation. However, he persevered, conjointly with another magistrate, in his presentment, little dreaming of the storm of dissatisfaction which that notable scheme would arouse in the excited parishes. At the meeting of the next court, protests against that threatened waste of money, of the most emphatic character, poured thickly in ; and many of the parishes employed terms which denoted a spirit at



once mutinous and menacing. Magistrates officiating in the respective localities had been urged to oppose the measure ; and such was the universal exasperation caused by that proposition, that the court was too glad to appease the general wrath by blowing Mr. Rotch's presentment 'to the four winds of heaven.'

In all his intrusive measures and disturbing speculations, Mr. Rotch found a ready supporter in another magistrate, who most unwisely distinguished himself by a blind adhesion to the plans of his leader. As a ready seconder of nearly every motion, provided only it should emanate from that quarter, a life was infused into many a proposition which would, otherwise, have died a natural death. In a conversation I had with a third magistrate, whose speeches and general remarks were often pungent and epigrammatic, he observed, in reference to that unwise coalition—"Rotch, you see, is 1 ; but ——— is 0 ; still, 1 and 0 makes 10." I trust, that gentleman looks back with some remorse to his co-operation in such an agitation. As he was



esteemed by his friends to be honest, though enthusiastic, there can be little doubt that he confided in the sincerity of a man who could blend, at will, ignoble schemes with a marvelous external fascination, by which he charmed the fancy and dispelled suspicion. I mourned over that gentleman's hallucination equally with his personal friends.



## CHAPTER IX.

AN IRISH LADY'S VISIT, AND CHANGE FROM PITY TO  
SEVERITY — THE GAROTTE SYSTEM INTRODUCED —  
SANCTIMONIOUS REPROBATES.

THE commission contained the name of an Irish gentleman, who was distinguished by a mild and courteous deportment, as well as by a pronunciation which infallibly proclaimed his country. Death did not allow him a very protracted exercise of magisterial authority, and he left behind him a good name, at least. He one day conducted over the prison a lady of lofty stature, imposing bulk, and of sandy complexion ; her speech, moreover, betraying an Hibernian brogue far more *prononcé* than



that of her companion. Nothing remarkable occurred during our progress through the building ; but, as she was about to take her departure, she once more cast her eyes towards the 'fly-wheel,' or governing power of the treadwheel, which, connected by shafts with numerous internal wheels, revolved with a velocity that astonished most strangers. As the lady eyed that powerful machinery, she exclaimed, with an emphatic accent—"Ah ! there they go—tread, tread—climb, climb ! Poor things ! Be kind to them, Mr. Chesterton, and don't work them too hard !"—and, having pronounced that merciful ejaculation, she departed.

In about a fortnight's time, the magistrate and his lady friend re-appeared within the prison gates ; and, on seeing me, he left his companion, and running to me, with a countenance darkened by apparent deep concern, said—"You know that poor lady there ? Ah ! poor thing, she has lost her dog ! She is in great distress, for her dog was worth £15, and the scoundrel who stole it is here with you !" He then proceeded to describe a noto-



rious dog-stealer, who had recently been committed for pursuing his offensive craft ; and he implored that some one might question the fellow, and see if—upon any terms—the dog might be restored to its owner.

The chief warder was an able tactician in any negociation with a thief, of whatever denomination (and, by the way, he was never concerned in one of doubtful morality), and he soon extracted from my prisoner his perfect acquaintance with the robbery in question ; and the varlet had the assurance to promise restitution of the dog for the payment of seven pounds. I was scandalized at the effrontery of such a proposition, and strongly advised the parties not to give a premium to rascality, by acceding to so exorbitant a demand ; and they adopted my counsel. Turning to withdraw, the lady cast her eyes once more upon the rapidly revolving fly-wheel, and seemed to be hurried into her previous reverie, with, however, a very dissimilar sequence in her concluding reflections. “ Ah ! there they go—tread, tread, climb, climb ! ” she exclaimed, as before ; and then, suddenly assuming the



wildest energy, she continued, with outstretched arm and clenched hand—"Work them to death, Mr. Chesterton—work them to death! I don't care what you do to them, now they've got my dog!" Thus saying, she burst away fiercely from the gate—all her recent charity having evaporated with the disappearance of her dog.

Often, indeed, could we indulge in a passing smile, on the sudden change of tone and sentiment with ladies, in particular, who, as they surveyed the erring children of humanity, would, in the outset, give vent to the tenderness of their nature. The accents of pity would, however, suddenly be changed into reproach and denunciation, when they found that some desperate wrong towards their own sex was the crime of the imprisoned.

Upon one occasion, several ladies, during their inspection, had indulged in a strain of lamentation over the captive condition of the entire host, when they suddenly observed an old thin man, with silvery locks, working in the garden. He had been convicted of 'manslaughter;' for, in a moment of fierce dispute



and struggle with his wife, he had dealt her a mortal blow, and killed her. The ladies in question were sensibly touched with the captivity of one so aged and feeble, and they employed superlative language to testify their pity. At length, the question was asked—"What can that poor *dear* old man have done to be imprisoned at his age?" Without circumlocution, I replied—"Why, he killed his wife in a fight." Sternness instantly usurped the place of benignity, and the exclamation from one or other, of "Wretch, monster, brute!" and other reproachful terms, evinced the rapid transition from sympathy to disgust, while they hurried from the sight of one now so polluted in their eyes.

A lady, who happened to have inquired into the offence of two men whom she noticed at work, and who chanced, singularly enough, to be imprisoned—the one, for *bigamy*, for two years—and the other, for *polygamy*, for six months only—jocosely remarked, in extenuation of the milder sentence—"That doubtless the court deemed him to have been already severely punished, by the dire perplexity of managing three wives at once."



The mild sentences awarded for that class of crime have often astonished me, and even now I do not quite comprehend their principle. In the case, however, I have cited, the distinction was this:—the bigamist had combined perjury with heartless spoliation; while the polygamist had been simply unable to resist the fascinations of the sex. His judges, mayhap, in accordance with a rule in French jurisprudence, may have regarded the potency of feminine charms as *circonstances atténuantes*.

No smooth, designing, and deliberate cheat can transcend in baseness him who, under the subtle pretence of affection, repays the fond credulity of a woman by the gravest social wrong, committed simply to secure her money. To betray, to rob, and to desert, would seem to combine the refinements of craft and villany. I have had many such treacherous scoundrels for lengthened terms to deal with, and have had occasion to remark that, without exhibiting much shrewdness, they all appeared ever artfully on the watch to deceive by the exercise of low trickery.

A most extraordinary man of that class was



one who professed unlimited faith in all the dogmas of the Romish Church. He had been during three years in the monastery of St. Bernard, and affirmed that he had also been a monk of La Trappe. He had the virtue of extreme candour in the confession of his own unworthiness, and once affirmed, in my office, that he believed himself to be capable of any baseness to enhance his own individual interests ; and he described himself to be so selfish, that he would, without remorse, wrong any body in this world if he could only enrich or gratify himself. He said emphatically, “ I have *never* studied the feelings of others, but have always tried to advance my own gains, and my own comfort.”

Then he would assume a whining tone, and profess to have sinned grievously against God. He would stand with hands joined and up-raised, and with a sort of rapt devotion descant upon the gracious goodness of the Virgin, who, he affirmed, stood by him in his cell at night clothed in radiant garments, and illumined his cell by the brightness of her presence. He declared that so soon as he should be free, he



would hasten to Yorkshire, where he affirmed, there was a convent of La Trappe, enter it, and devote the remainder of his life to prayer and penance. I always had great doubts as to the faithful execution of that vow, for his first wife, a respectable cook, living in a family a few miles from London, in her account to her mistress of my pseudo-saintly prisoner, denuded him of every shred of moral character.

That man was one of the strangest compounds of worthlessness and religious fervour, real or pretended, that ever came under my notice. He was in fact a rare curiosity, and few people can imagine the attitude, the affected earnestness, and the strange rhapsodies with which he lauded a monastic life, and professed his adoration of the saints, and of the Blessed Virgin.

A similar inconsistent adherence to what must be deemed mock-sanctity, distinguished two persons, whose scrupulous deference to religious forms co-existed with practices of the most shameless depravity. I allude to two Israelites, man and wife, the former once distinguished as a pugilist, the latter remark-



able for outward suavity and beauty. Their name was Belasco.

In them I learned how deceptive were external appearances. They were both patterns of docility, and observed all the external rites of their creed, with the minutest exactitude, and most painful indefatigability. She was the very type of gentleness, and her face was so full of sweetness and apparent amiability, that few could conceive such a woman to have been a vile procuress, and a heartless despoiler of the unfortunate young creatures who fell into her clutches. They had both been brought within the meshes of the law by the infamous character of the house they kept, while the details of the extortion and inhuman wiles they had practised kindled wide-spread execration. Moreover, he likewise figured as the bully to a gaming-house.

People unlearned in the deep subtilties of creeds would never expect to find in such a man a *devotee*; and yet, his prayers, fastings, and ceremonial observances exceeded everything discernible in the numerous Jewish prisoners within my memory. I have



never been able to comprehend the secret springs that nurtured such devotional zeal, and yet coupled with it all that was wrongful to the most pitiable class of human beings, and destructive to the best interests of society. Yet, such was that unintelligible contrast. He underwent eighteen months' imprisonment with hard labour, and she one year. Throughout that time, not the minutest fault could be found with this Pharisaical couple—their conduct was all that authority need exact—but, notwithstanding their ceaseless religious exercises, and incomprehensible devotion, they returned, when free, to their brutalizing avocations.

Marvellous are the varieties with which men clothe their evil propensities. We have just contemplated some singular species of the creeping reptile order; and now behold a contrast in the matchless turpitude, and overt violence of hardier villains.

Public alarm has been greatly excited of late by a new and atrocious system of robbery, which has assumed the name of 'garotte.' It was first introduced into England by a ruffian,



who, having outlived a term of transportation in Australia, had returned home with a mind which, naturally depraved and ferocious, had received a brutalizing impetus from his association with the herds of abandoned miscreants who thronged the lists of convicts.

That pitiless monster was imprisoned at Cold Bath Fields, within a short period of my retirement, under the common designation of a 'rogue and vagabond,' for 'attempting to commit felony.' He was a man of powerful frame, about five feet nine inches in height, and apparently not exceeding forty years of age. His deportment in prison was marked by obedience, and his address was superior to that of the ordinary mass of outlaws. His countenance, strongly marked, indicated sternness ; and his brows, arched and bushy, while they seemed to confirm that passing impression, nevertheless denoted no lack of native intellectual vigour. His face had not the decided stamp of downright sottishness, but yet it sufficiently indicated intemperate habits. His walk displayed a slight bow in one leg ; and, upon the whole, his gait and appearance were of marked peculiarity.



One forenoon we were astonished by a very large and unusual muster of police-constables about the outer gate, headed by a select number of inspectors, forming altogether a force of upwards of one hundred. They proved to be officers, drafted from the various metropolitan divisions, who had been detached for the purpose of scanning the features, and noting the general bearing of this dangerous malefactor. The inspection had been directed by the Home Secretary, and a letter was handed to me from the Police Commissioners, requesting that Johnson (such was his present name) might be attired in his own dress, and submitted to the scrutiny of the attendant police-constables. That was accordingly done, and most of the constables took special memoranda (in foreign passport fashion) of all the traits of that ruthless man, who stood surveying the group, thus busily occupied, with assumed scorn and indifference.

For several successive days, fresh constables arrived upon the same errand; and the culprit was so repeatedly required to assume his own dress, that at length he remonstrated with me



upon the hardship of submitting to so frequent an exhibition. Upon that occasion his appeal was mildly forcible, and I could not fail to discern his superior address, and a mental power far above his degraded order. The inspectors described him to me as the most merciless robber in the kingdom; they informed me of his having originated, in London, the garotte system, which he had himself largely practised; and they imputed to him a murder at Clapham, which they affirmed he had doubtless committed, but which could not be brought home to him for want of sufficient evidence. Whether these charges were of indisputable authority, I know not, but extraordinary information must have been acquired to justify a course so unprecedented against a man simply confined under summary conviction.

Again, on the day of Johnson's discharge, was the outer gate thronged by police-constables—since the resolution had been taken to have him pursued and closely watched wherever he might go. That step was observed, and proved so intolerable to the criminal him-



self, that he deliberately attempted a robbery within sight of the officers of justice, purposely, as he affirmed to me, to be again committed, and thus be relieved from such wearisome vigilance.

During the period of his second imprisonment, the prison was visited by a party, composed chiefly of ladies, bearing a magistrate's order to authorize the admission. I chanced to be inspecting the vagrant's ward when that party entered it ; and, whilst I was exchanging some passing civilities with those visitors, an elegant young lady of the party noticed the strong features of Johnson, as he was silently exercising, and asked me who that ferocious-looking man could be ? I satisfied her curiosity, and remarked, with some emphasis, "That man would batter out your brains, if he could gain sixpence by the act, without the slightest compunction." My words produced a death-like paleness in the poor girl's countenance, and she seemed ready to faint. Claspings her hands with involuntary horror, she turned and rushed from the yard, and some minutes elapsed ere she could regain



her composure. That touching scene seemed to impress the ruffian's features more indelibly upon my memory.

He ultimately quitted the prison, vowing to go abroad if he could once elude the eye of his pursuers, and, as I saw him no more, he may either have accomplished that design, or, at least, have shifted the ground for his ruthless exploits to some other field not barred to him by his wide-spread, metropolitan notoriety.

The increasing frequency of these atrocious robberies, and the well-founded alarm resulting from them, would seem to imply some grave defect in the action of the law as regards such inhuman perpetrations. Surely if ever crime invoked the application of the lash, it is called for by this monstrous turpitude.

In the delineation of characters whose crimes were of the deeper dye, I must not fail to record one of eminent atrocity. The public was, many years since, familiar with the name of Sheen, a wretch, who, in a fit of drunken phrenzy, had cut off the head of his infant child, and, when placed in the felon's dock, was, by the refined absurdity of the law, ac-



quitted, simply owing to the erroneous addition to, or omission of, the letter *e* in his name. That startling escape raised a shout of indignation, and necessitated the abrogation of so mischievous a requirement. Thenceforth, the correct spelling of the name on arraignment, was dispensed with, provided only the identity of the party should be duly attested.

That fellow was one of those conscienceless villains, who practised without compunction any amount of infamy, and would whine out his own justification, and strive to give effect to it by well-dissembled tears. I had the custody of him twice ; on the second occasion, for having kept in Whitechapel the lowest order of brothel, in which he not only harboured unhappy children of tender years, but by a systematic process, drilled them into dexterity in picking pockets, purchased the proceeds of their robberies, making the enormous deduction which enriches receivers, and, in short, was reputed to combine within himself every conceivable branch of nefarious commerce.

His countenance betokened a hard, unfeeling



nature, and few physiognomists would fail to descry in it the indelible sternness of his character. In prison, he was always circumspect. He loved his vile self too well to incur any punishment. He was regarded with curiosity by most visitors, and habitually professed to those privileged to address him, his earnest desire to be put in the way of reformation, until the late lamented Captain Brenton, R.N. (founder of the now dissolved Children's Friend Society), assured him that *he* would afford him aid and countenance to become a better man, if he were really sincere. He tried hard to squeeze out a tear, while confronted with Captain Brenton, but from that time forth he became silent as the grave on the theme of future reformation. He was one of the worst men within my memory, and on his release, after eighteen months' imprisonment, he returned to Whitechapel, and resumed his abandoned career.

A conviction, of a somewhat similar nature, against a woman, named Steward, was the means of bringing me acquainted with the late Sir Astley Cooper, on the very day that he



completed his seventieth year. His noble form seemed then to retain unusual elasticity ; his countenance displayed undiminished health ; while his fascinating manners, and sportive humour, have caused me to number him amongst the most agreeable men with whom I have conversed. Although his visit had been a friendly professional one, he went through the establishment, seemed to take much interest in its internal management, and lingered, with apparent interest, during two hours.

Rumour had attached surpassing infamy to a house not far from Portland Place, kept by the woman Steward, until the parish officers had been compelled to institute a prosecution, which elicited disclosures tending to stamp that creature as a panderer to vice, upon a scale of polluted magnificence, indicative of a mind steeped in abomination. A conviction entailed upon her the sentence of six months' imprisonment with hard labour. She was a fine, stout woman, not yet *passée*, with a stamp of features strangely blending beauty with sinister expression. She told me she was



the widow of a surgeon of one of the West India regiments, and professed to have been in Jamaica with her husband.

From the first moment of her arrival, she had complained of occasional acute pain in the left breast, where a discoloration, and knotted surface, indicated latent mischief. The conflicting opinions of medical men (one of whom, then considered eminent, used very original terms to deny the cancerous nature of the affection) induced the prison surgeon to solicit the opinion of Sir Astley Cooper; and hence the visit of that distinguished man, who communicated to us the fact that he had that day attained his seventieth year.

In the infirmary, the woman Steward was prepared for his inspection, and but one other patient was there, who was suffering from an affection of the eyes. A cursory examination sufficed; but no sooner had Sir Astley formed his opinion, than, with considerate tact, he suddenly left the woman Steward, and, hurrying across to the other patient, inquired—"What is the matter with your eyes?" and, giving her some passing advice, he left the



infirmary. This was manifestly done to avoid any declaration of his judgment to the sufferer herself. No sooner had the doors been closed, and we were without the hearing of those in the infirmary, than Sir Astley, turning to the prison surgeon, said—"That is the most malignant cancer I ever saw in all my life ; and, as a proof of my opinion, I will write the strongest certificate my pen can draw up." Then, reasoning upon probabilities, he assigned to Steward about six months to live—a calculation which proved to be critically just. The mortal character of the ailment had caused her to be released from prison, and transferred to a hospital, where she died. Thus miserably ended the guilty speculations of an intelligent but degraded woman.

We had at that very identical time, in the 'convalescent ward,' a man afflicted with an irritable wound on the cheek, caused—as he averred—by the bite of a furious horse, at Constantinople. It had hitherto resisted all treatment, was extending itself, and had just reached the corner of the eye, which it threatened to destroy. Sir Astley observed and



examined the wound, and then asked the man if he were anxious to be cured. A prompt affirmative reply was followed by another question—"Would you endure a good deal of pain, in order to be cured?" "I would endure anything, sir," said the sufferer, "to be again well!" "Then," said Sir Astley, "you *shall* be cured;" and he prescribed an application which I have never since forgotten—a solution of arsenic in sulphuric acid, to be from time to time applied to the wound with a jobbed stick. Affirming the undoubted efficacy of the prescription, he left the poor fellow elated with new-born hope.

The great surgeon's prediction was amply verified, for when the man was shortly after discharged, the wound was rapidly healing; and thus, by the accidental presence of a mind stored with medical knowledge, was that poor sufferer spared from acute torture—nay, most likely, his very existence had been preserved.

Sir Astley Cooper concluded his visit by repairing to the office, there to draw up the promised certificate in Steward's case, when the clerk, by inadvertence, handed him a pen



dipped in red ink. He looked first at the pen and then at the clerk, and, assuming an arch gravity, exclaimed, "Now you meant that ironically! Come, confess you did! You said to yourself, that old scoundrel has dealt in blood all his lifetime, and now he shall sign his name in it!" He took his departure, leaving us charmed with his cheerfulness, his gentle deportment, and master mind.

Before I dismiss the subject of the wretched woman Steward, I must record a visit paid to her by a young person whose appearance led me to reflect how scarcely possible it is for those best acquainted with the criminal orders, to fathom the innumerable agencies in the advancement of human wickedness. The doom of Steward being now unquestionable, mercy interposed in her behalf, and suggested that any reasonable wish on her part should be gratified. She had urgently desired to see occasionally the young person in question, whom she called 'Mary,' and the visiting justices having assented, Mary accordingly came. She proved to be a young woman of striking beauty and modest demeanour, and



was attired in a style of unexceptionable gentility. Her external appearance was that of the gentlewoman. There was not a trace of immodesty discernible in her countenance, nor aught in her general bearing even remotely to indicate an abandoned calling, while from her speech it might be inferred that she had been well educated. Yet such an individual, apparently not more than twenty-four years of age, was 'bar-maid,' as Steward informed me, in a house which, it transpired in evidence, had been furnished with the most costly appliances that impure invention could select in the promotion of vice. Who could that young woman be, and how came she thus associated and employed? are questions which might naturally pique the curiosity of the moralist.



## CHAPTER X.

TRANSFER OF FEMALE PRISONERS—THEIR EXCESS OF  
GRIEF—MEN TRAINED TO SUPPLY THE INDUSTRY OF  
FEMALES—MECHANICAL SKILL OF CONVICTS.

YEARS had rolled on, and yet it never appears to have occurred to those numerous magistrates, who had directed their attention to the improvement of the county's institutions, that an unnecessary expense had long been incurred, and a useless complication tolerated by the maintenance of two prisons for females, within the same jurisdiction, and within a league of each other. At length, however, Mr. Turner—a magistrate, whose mind had scanned, with all practical intelligence, various modes of enlarging the buildings, and securing



increased convenience—exposed the inutility of that unwise division, and the obvious economy of a different arrangement. Mr. Turner's project was entertained, and it was resolved thenceforth to consign the whole mass of the Middlesex female prisoners to the prison at Tothill Fields, together with the boys, and devote the prison at Cold Bath Fields exclusively to male adults. By the adoption of that common-sense rule, one staff only, for the government and instruction of females, became requisite, whereby a considerable saving to the county necessarily ensued. On Monday, the 30th of September, 1850, the transfer was appointed to take effect.

The preliminary examination of clothes, and the mode for the re-delivery of money and other property to their several claimants, necessitated individual references. Those unusual dispositions excited surprise in the minds of the prisoners, who wondered what they could portend; but still the real object had not been divulged. Silence was indispensable to secure the safety of the transit, and it had been well preserved.



However, on the day preceding the removal (Sunday), the female prisoners were all assembled in the chief work-room, after morning service ; and there, supervised by the attendants, they either read their Bibles or appropriate books, or listened to some competent reader, who read aloud for the general instruction. A previous consultation with the matron had induced us both to think that we could not proceed to the final removal, on the morrow, without imparting to the poor dependent creatures, who were to be the objects of the change, the reasons for the forthcoming movement. Consequently, I repaired to the workroom, and, in terms as soothing as I could possibly employ, I addressed the 230 female prisoners there assembled, and explained to them the cause of the intended transfer ; impressing upon them that, notwithstanding the change of locality, there would be no aggravation of their own condition. So soon, however, as those unhappy creatures gathered the true import of my communication, there arose a loud and universal wail. Tears, convulsive sobs, and every outward symbol of grief—nay, of



poignant anguish—seemed to agitate the whole assembly, without one solitary exception ; and the outburst of woe was of so touching a nature, that the matron (a stern functionary, little given to tears) and all her subordinates wept, perforce, in concert with the prisoners. The scene was at once singular and impressive, and filled me with such involuntary emotion that my voice faltered, and at length denied me further utterance. In vain, throughout that afternoon, was my word of comfort whispered ; little heed was given to the evening service, and the prisoners retired to bed in the midst of unabated sighs and moans.

The remarkable demonstration was but the prelude of one of greater intensity on the morrow, when, at seven o'clock, the prison vans, and hired omnibuses, one by one, drew up to receive their living freight. Deep distress was, more or less, visible in all—but, with many, it assumed the form of the wildest despair. They were supported from their wards in an all but fainting state, and lifted into the vehicles scarcely able there to sustain an erect posture ; while, as each successive carriage



moved away, the throbs of grief were redoubled. One miserable girl, of lost but strangely distinctive character, quite surprised me by the excess of her sorrow. Unable to stand, she was carried to the van, and a stranger to the work in progress would have imagined that the doom of death at least awaited her, and that she was about to undergo the law's last penalty.

A. B——y was a young creature, little more than eighteen years of age, who had yet been twice convicted of burglary at dead of night, and was then undergoing a sentence of one year's imprisonment for that very unfeminine offence. No one who saw her could fail to award her the meed of beauty. Short of stature, but critically proportioned, she was distinguished by a *petite tournure* of faultless symmetry. With a profusion of raven hair, brilliant eyes of jet, teeth of polished whiteness, her small expressive features were arched by brows which imparted an air of intellectuality to the whole countenance. Her deportment indicated gentleness, and she moved with the grace of a sylph. Amongst the many



thousands of her sex, who, during twenty-five years, have been under my control, A. B. stands recorded in my memory as pre-eminent beyond every other in outward beauty.

I had looked upon one so young and lovely, and yet so depraved, with more than ordinary pity, for it is useless for abstract philanthropy to urge the equal claims of all to impartial sympathy. Where beauty and gentleness prevail, they will extort a large share of interest in the beholder, *malgré lui*. My special attention, however, towards this young criminal had shortly before been aroused by the visit of two ladies, who came, in an elegant carriage, on woman's noblest mission, to snatch, if possible, an erring sister from the vortex of crime, and entice her into the peaceful path of virtue. They introduced the subject to me by professing much interest in the unhappy girl's mother, whom they described as most respectable, and pining with grief at the ruin of her daughter, who had been allured into the most abandoned society—as, indeed, her offence too surely indicated. These kind ladies deplored the fall of one so young, and, as they themselves



observed, of such surpassing beauty. They asked permission to see her in my presence, with a view to persuade her, when her imprisonment should terminate, to return to her afflicted mother.

A. B., on seeing those ladies, whom she instantly recognized, hid her face in her hands and sobbed audibly. Throughout the interview she did not utter one word, but to the repeated solicitations of her advisers to return home, she merely shook her head. Alternate counsel and reproaches, elicited nothing beyond that negative sign. She pertinaciously refused their kind offices, and was ordered back to the females' ward, while those good ladies sorrowfully withdrew, deeply mortified at the ill success of their mission. Within a quarter of an hour of their departure, word was brought me that A. B. had become most insubordinate, was singing aloud in her cell, and defying authority. No similar conduct had been heretofore observable in her, and the occasion of that outbreak might have been expected to produce, in a reflective mind, a far different demeanour. I consigned her to the refractory



cell, and there, during twenty-four hours, the like termagancy was maintained. It is really marvellous to note the saucy flippancy and penitential tenderness which, with intermittent succession, mark the bearing of many of those weak and wayward creatures. In this instance, on my passing remark to the female warder who attended me, that it was lamentable to behold a girl so endowed with the gifts of nature, that, had she been commonly discreet, she might have been an ornament to her station, instead of proving a heartless vixen, A. B. burst into tears, implored forgiveness, and confessed that she had ‘behaved shamefully.’

I was too happy to terminate the struggle with a temper not habitually mutinous, and instantly restored her to her class. From that time forth she continued gentle, and appeared to be even dejected. To my earnest entreaty that she would thenceforth shun the baneful society she had kept, which would, in time, assuredly render her a desperate and dangerous woman, she exclaimed, under an excess of emotion—“Oh! no, no! I will not become a desperate and dangerous woman! Indeed,



*indeed, I will try to be good !*" That better frame of mind was the prelude to the overwhelming grief and depression that made her almost faint with agony on the memorable morning of the general removal.

Her demeanour at Westminster was discreet, but, since her discharge, no one appears to know what has become of her. However, I do not learn that she has been again imprisoned, and hope suggests that she may have become timely wise, and retreated from the paths of destruction.

The only cause I could assign for the manifestation of that boundless perturbation was in the apprehensions of the better order of assembled convicts, not used to be bandied about from prison to prison. Here they knew their rulers, and their treatment, but they knew nothing of the place to which they were bound, nor the supervisors they might there encounter. Their alarm was real, and they gave vent to their grief unmistakeably, while others, really less sensitive, could not resist the influence of that sorrowful demonstration, but imitatively followed an example, which



also overpowered the self-possession of the attendants. The scene was not likely to be soon forgotten by any who had witnessed it.

In losing our women, we seemed to have lost also one or more of our indispensable resources. Our sempstresses and laundresses had departed, and had left us in a state of hopeless privation. Westminster, with befitting dignity, rejected our offer of patronage and spurned our soiled linen, and no reasoning or expostulation could induce a change of resolution. The office of *lavator* was deemed humiliating, and Middlesex declined to minister to the cleanliness of itself. Contracts for such an object would prove costly and troublesome; but, while pondering over our sudden destitution, we were happily relieved from the dilemma by a practical notion, which seized my mind. Sailors afloat were, I reasoned, thrown upon their own adroitness in matters pertaining to the repair of vestments, and the purification of linen, a seaman therefore might be found usefully to aid us in this emergency.

We had amongst the warders, a quondam man-of-war's man, named Bray, who had long



displayed intelligence as a prison officer ; and upon him I began to rest my hopes of disentanglement from a grave perplexity. To my queries he returned ready answers, purporting that necessity had taught him to do everything of the kind we now required, for himself. He could sew, wash, iron, and knit, and accepted with zeal my commission to go through the prison and select such of the inmates as would suit our present purpose.

In an incredibly short space of time this happy experiment was clothed with complete success, and it became a curious feature in our new condition to behold scores of male convicts exercising the needle, with a perfection not to be surpassed by the pliant fingers of woman. Knitters were soon drilled into proficiency—nay, we might have contended for a prize in the manufacture of stockings. Making our own shirts, darning our own hose and linen, washing with special aptitude, and ironing with supreme art—we caused stranger ladies to marvel at our ingenuity, and flatteringly to compare products from the rude fingers of our promiscuous needle-men with the finished



specimens from the hands of women practised in such employments from their infancy.

But, in truth, we were not only distinguished in this department by industrial success, for in whatever we undertook, through the instrumentality of convicts, their mechanical skill surpassed expectation, as did also their indefatigable energy and application. Our rug and mat manufactory extorted the encomiums of all visitors, and in the patterns and perfections of the former article we exhibited much artistic skill, while coir mats and matting, of any requisite pattern or measurement, issued from our hands in prolific abundance.

In tailoring and shoemaking, our efficiency was remarkable. Under the direction of competent instructors, many prisoners became adepts in those branches, and the prison clothing, our officers' uniforms, together with shoes, boots, and garments for other county establishments, were produced in a style of finish nearly approaching to fashionable. In the manlier handicrafts, the capacity we frequently elicited was extraordinary, nor, where



mechanical skill abounded, had we ever cause to observe sluggishness in work. On the contrary, the interests displayed in careful elaboration, and the assiduity bestowed upon useful designs, might vie with the most earnest zeal and application of highly paid artizans.

The consequence was, the buildings were extended, improved, or repaired in a manner to warrant the conviction, that if in any locality the requirement should arise, by first constructing the outer wall, to ensure security, convicts themselves might, under proper guidance, be made to erect and complete the requisite structures for their own abode, and material employments. Indeed, if the whole subject of convict government were properly digested, there is hardly a limit to the resources within the power of those competent to discover and direct them.

In thus noting the mechanical capabilities of our inmates, developed from time to time with such masterly superiority, we could not forbear to deplore the besotted improvidence of those so endowed. My first acquaintance with this senseless delinquency arose in the



earlier period of my prison career. A man named Peat had undergone two years' imprisonment for theft, and had, during that time, evinced a rare perfection in his trade of carpenter. Equally expert and laborious he had been deemed worthy of liberal reward, and left the prison with a sum equal to sustain honest resolutions in one so unrivalled as a workman.

His first step, however, was to take a house under false representations, and by the aid of his son (a young man just twenty-one years of age) to fit up a shop with all the ostensible paraphernalia of a thriving general business. A goodly row of canisters, divisional lines to imitate drawers carefully labelled, bags piled one above the other, apparently containing ingredients, but in reality stuffed with sand or saw-dust,—all outwardly indicating a brisk trade. Then succeeded the real designs, viz., to order goods from, and to defraud wholesale dealers. In this case I learned the term applied by deliberate cheats (who by the way fraternize) to these deceptive appurtenances. Such fictitious fitting to simulate a prosperous



undertaking were called 'dummies,' and Peat's stock-in-trade consisted exclusively of dummies.

With this was combined the deep villany of tutoring his son, also a carpenter, in the pernicious wiles which had already degraded himself. Detection speedily followed these attempts at spoliation, and within six months of Peat's release from his preceding long imprisonment, he was again arraigned, convicted, and sentenced to transportation; while his son, a well-looking and intelligent young man, whose curse it was to possess so base a father, was imprisoned with hard labour for one year. Turpitude, on the one hand, and lack of forethought on the other, manifest in this case, could scarcely be exceeded and in it, we behold a conspicuous example of the peril attending the first divergence from the paths of probity. *Facilis descensus sed revocare gradum, hinc labor, hoc opus est!*

Extensive alterations in the governor's house called forth, some few years subsequently to Peat's disgrace, the most surprising mechanical capability in an aged prisoner, who was then



under a two years' sentence for receiving stolen goods. From the hopefulness of a first-rate handicraftsman, he had voluntarily descended to the suspicious vocation of a dealer in marine stores—too often found to be a mere cloak for dishonest traffic. His ability, as a workman, was varied; and nothing in the arts of a cabinet-maker, joiner, and general decorator, seemed to defy his capacity. Smooth of speech, specious in professions, and profuse in promises, he deceived us all into the belief that he would thenceforth eschew malpractices, and cling to morality. In vain, however, had such vows been registered, for this gifted mechanic could not resist the enticement of inordinate, though hazardous, gains, but relapsed into the furtive receiver of plunder.

For a third time had I afterwards to note the like infatuation in a superior craftsman, who underwent eighteen months' imprisonment. The committee-room, within Cold Bath Fields, can still testify to that *felon's* choice workmanship; and in every part, where mechanical skill, and the nicest artistic discrimination were exacted, did that aged reprobate



justify the confidence reposed in his superior ability.

That miserable man's earnest protestations had seduced me into the belief, that trifling temporary aid might result in his re-establishment in self-respect, and in renewed integrity. Consequently, I volunteered some initiatory employment for my own benefit; and, irrespective of the cheapest market, I engaged his temporary services.

My domestics, who necessarily watched him as an untrustworthy workman, soon had cause to question his aberrations from the task assigned him, since he rather too eagerly eyed any article of stray plate or moveable furniture. Their suspicions induced me to discard him from my house. I did not forbear to impart the distrust which his demeanour had occasioned; but, paying him liberally for his short earnings, I despatched him with the payment of about twenty-two shillings. He pocketed that sum, and departed. Within five minutes of his leaving my office, possessed of an amount more than adequate to supply his immediate wants, he was taken up for



picking a pocket ; and, after examination, was committed to Newgate for trial.

Here, I myself may be permitted to moralize, and to suggest to the theoretic speculator on the possible resuscitation of character, how much my strong infusion of pristine hope in the reclaimable qualities of the lawless became by degrees diluted, until it entirely evaporated. I had even to contemplate the sad, and I may truly say unlooked-for, example of disregard of past suffering and disgrace, in the son of a Captain of the Royal Navy. That young man (an only son) had, for an aggravated felony, passed through the severe ordeal of three years' imprisonment and hard labour. Addiction to loose pleasures had caused his downfall ; but even that bitter lesson did not suffice ! He relapsed into unsteadiness, and was hurried, by his sorrowing parents, to a distant country, in order to obviate the possible scandal of another criminal process. There he died, leaving behind a painfully dishonoured memory. Alas ! alas ! how discouraging is the task of those who labour to eradicate the



rank and poisonous weeds that choke up the avenues to moral reformation in the blindly vicious! Have I not grounds for scepticism?



## CHAPTER XI.

## VAGRANTS.

I CANNOT altogether condemn the sensitive feelings of many charitable people, who, notwithstanding sage counsel to deter them, persist in giving alms to those who solicit them in the public streets. It is just *possible* that some poor starving wretch may, under the craving pangs of hunger, betake himself to that very last resort. Such an example would, however, be of the rarest imaginable occurrence ; for there is scarcely a record of such humiliation, on the part of the most pinched and impoverished amongst the honest poor, who retain a scintilla of self-respect.



The late Mr. Mathias, who was for so many years rector of Whitechapel—and was, moreover, a county magistrate—affirmed invariably that, after a very extended acquaintance with the sons and daughters of poverty, in a neighbourhood in which they abounded, he had never known a single instance of the honest poor stooping to wander abroad to beg. He reiterated the fact of that experience before a committee of parliament, and to myself individually he was most emphatic in that assertion.

After such a declaration, on the part of one who was as kind and charitable as he was observant, it will not surprise the reader that my long acquaintance with public beggars has impressed me with the utter worthlessness of their characters. Taking them for all in all, they are as depraved and bad a class as any who are ever to be found within those prison walls. Idle, drunken, dirty, and in every way degraded, most of them were only not thieves because they did not possess the courage or energy to be so. Their grovelling souls dared not aspire to the bold adventure



of dexterous abstraction; but, sunk in swinish abasement, many of them were really inferior to most of the brute species.

Still, even amongst that swarm of reprobates, were sometimes to be found instances calculated equally to pain or to revolt the mind. The Vagrant Act was not only applicable to the creeping beggar or the sturdy vagabond, it included in its penal grasp those who, being houseless, lodged in the open air, or who wandered abroad, and did not give a good account of themselves. Under that last denomination, upwards of twenty years ago, a young man, in rags, was committed, whose mind appeared to have sustained some weakening influence. Within the month for which he had been committed, his mental vigour seemed to revive; and, shrinking under some afflicting consciousness, he mildly sought permission to write. The letter, beginning 'My dear father,' was addressed to an esquire, at ——— Park, Oxfordshire. Struck by so unusual an incident, I sought an explanation, and heard, with deep sorrow, that my poor young prisoner was the son of a gentleman of fortune and



position—that a succession of fits had made him irresponsible for his actions—that he had months ago wandered from home unconscious of his course, and, at length, in want and rags, had been apprehended in Middlesex, and committed to my custody. After the abatement of his fits, his intellects providentially became strengthened, and the light of reason revealed to him his actual condition.

His father's answer contained the liveliest expressions of joy. The family had mourned their son as lost, unable, however, to divine what his end had been. Clothes, suitable to the young man's real condition, were sent up; money was enclosed to me, with an earnest request that I would have him conducted, the moment he was free, to the coach, which passed his father's gates, while the coachman had been commissioned to take charge of the wanderer; and thus, in due time, he was restored to his friends and home.

The late Captain Carpenter, when a visiting justice, saw a man then imprisoned as a common beggar, whom he had known as a captain in the army, and I have yet to record another



instance of such deplorable debasement. For many years did my next unhappy subject alternately occupy three of the metropolitan prisons, so unblushingly giving his own name, O'Shea, that it would be a needless affectation to suppress it. Up to the day of his death—a somewhat recent period—he remained in the receipt of the half-pay of an ensign. I had known him as an officer in the West Indies, and would frequently remark to him how little we could then have divined that our acquaintance would have assumed so altered a form. For a long period, O'Shea simply filled the character of an outrageous disturber of the peace, and brawled and fought from sheer inebriety. At length, however, his lavish waste of money upon drink, and the loss of coin he experienced while rolling about in a state of drunken insensibility, would reduce him to beggary, and he then scrupled not to infest the streets as a common beggar. It would be impossible for me to compute the number of times he had been committed to Cold Bath Fields, nor to surmise how often he had been detained in other custody; but I do



not believe he was ever accused of theft. The authorities of the Horse Guards—most unwisely, as I contend—declined to deprive him of his half-pay, because he had not been convicted of felony, or of the most scandalous order of misdemeanour (a lenity seemingly observed in all cases); and thus a contribution of public money ministered, through his agency, to public outrage and unseemliness. I know that his gross misconduct had been reported, but no notice whatever was taken of the representation, and O'Shea rioted and begged with impunity; while, irrespective of his half-pay, he largely taxed the public purse for his maintenance in prisons.

I believe it to be a pure fiction to estimate the gains of the begging clique as highly as the public has been wont to assess them; and the tales of evening enjoyment, hot suppers, and 'lemon with their veal cutlet,' are mere amusing epicurean fables. On the contrary, according to my observation, the life appears to be a hard one, and the fare attending it the very reverse of sumptuous. The adventurer who revels in abundance is the begging-letter impostor.



For the foregoing reason I have never been able to comprehend the preference given by hale, able-bodied young men, who, rather than face creditable industry, would stand shivering in the cold, with garments barely sufficient to cloak their nakedness—purposely rent and tattered—in order to provoke a sympathy but rarely excited. Their vocation entails upon them endless imprisonments, and the entire life appears to me to be one of so much privation and discomfort, that it is marvellous how any rational being can voluntarily embrace it.

And yet, I have known many possessed of those grovelling instincts, who, for upwards of twenty years, have simply moved from the prison to the streets, and from the streets to prison. I have often reasoned with them, and have been surprised to find that most of the young and vigorous did not evince the lowest mark of intelligence. I have consequently been so perplexed to assign a cause for their fatuity, that I could only solve the mystery by referring it to a special organization which denies them the discernment implanted in others.



Some more callous miscreants were known to pursue a branch of that unmanly calling, which would most appropriately be met by instant severe castigation. The objects selected for their extortion would be ladies walking abroad by themselves, or accompanied solely by young children; and, seizing their opportunity, such fellows would pursue them with importunities, and at length so alarm them by vociferations and filthy abuse, as to terrify them into a contribution. I often had the custody of a fellow named Draper, who, during the whole twenty-five years of my government, was known to have practised such detestable schemes.

The tramps, or ubiquitary wanderers, display a taste far superior to that of the London 'cadgers.' They, at any rate, may contemplate the riches of nature, bask under verdant foliage, and inhale pure breezes.

Ere the enactment of the existing poor law, when the preliminary commission was busied in prosecuting inquiries, it was desirable to obtain all possible information on the subject of pauperism generally, and, as closely allied



to it, mendicancy also. I was, consequently, examined by the commission, and at the request of one of the body, undertook to procure, if possible, the statement of his life and practices from some experienced trumper. I soon discovered one within the prison, of some standing in that vocation, who, to my numerous questions, unhesitatingly returned the readiest answers, all of which I committed to paper for the enlightenment of the commission. The details communicated were deemed valuable, and some curiosity was excited to learn the personal history of the relator; consequently, I undertook to interrogate him on that point.

I informed him that I had much reason to applaud his candour upon the whole subject of tramping, and that I was anxious to glean some information concerning himself. Thereupon, he began to chuckle, and the proposition seemed to afford him a good deal of mirth, for he proceeded to laugh outright. In a minute or two, however, he became more serious, and at length exclaimed—"Well, sir, I'll be just as candid about myself as I have been about



everyone else. I am a man who don't like work, and, what's more" (with an oath), "I will not work except when I'm in prison, and then I can't help it!" He proceeded to declare that the life he led suited him, he enjoyed the country, realized a pleasing variety, and managed, in one way or another, to get his wants adequately supplied.

The Vagrant Act, as I have elsewhere stated, is a very comprehensive statute, and reaches offenders of very dissimilar characteristics, as will be fully understood from the following narration, derivable from a conviction under that act.

I betook myself one morning, according to custom, to the reception ward, where stood, arrayed for my inspection, the incomers of the previous day. Amongst the crowd, varying from time to time with the circumstances of their apprehension, would occasionally be seen an assemblage of persons of all outward appearances, smart, decent, and dirty. On this morning, however, the throng was unusually unseemly, and served more effectually to set off the unwonted contrast of a tall young man



of the most fashionable exterior. Much surprised to observe a person elegantly attired, and bearing the outward aspect of a gentleman, I eagerly inquired into the cause of his imprisonment, and was answered with a shrug of the shoulders, and a heavy sigh—"A strange mistake; I am accused of picking the pocket of an officer of the guards, at a bazaar. My name is Hawkesbury; I am the son of a major in the army, and am connected with some of the best families in England." I could only recommend an appeal to the Secretary of State, and affirmed that such an error (if error it should prove) might be speedily rectified.

During the forenoon, while I was occupied in my office, I was suddenly apprized that a gentleman desired to see me, when in walked a man of medium age, elegantly attired, and appearing to labour under excessive emotion. He held his handkerchief to his eyes, and appeared scarcely able to support himself, owing to the extremity of his agitation. I was moved by such well-simulated affliction, and employed the language of kind persuasiveness to restore composure, and, apparently, with



effect. In a short time, the stranger proceeded to inform me he was Major Hawkesbury, and that his unfortunate son was then my prisoner.

He dilated upon the fatal mistake, proclaimed his close connexion with a distinguished baronet, enlarged upon his elevated kindred and social ties, and all with such a specious assumption of truthfulness, that I was completely imposed upon, and verily confided in the entire statement. He shrunk from any appeal to the Secretary of State. "The family name must not be allowed to transpire in connection with such a stigma upon it; the whole matter must be kept secret," and he had only to implore my clemency towards his son. With my promise that I would watch over the health and safety of the young man, the *soi-disant* wretched father departed, leaving me in the firm belief that he was such as he had described himself to be.

Hawkesbury's deportment was meek and submissive. He duly fulfilled his sentence of six weeks, and left the prison with health apparently unimpaired.

Upwards of two years had rolled by, when



the same daily routine took me to the reception-ward, and there my wondering eyes once more beheld the elegant 'Hawkesworth,' who on this occasion had assumed a slight change of name. Again he pleaded some strange mistake, reiterated his claims to high lineage, and derided the supposition that such an one as he could, as alleged, have picked a pocket at the Italian Opera. However, he urged these pleas in vain; his calling was now clearly defined, and I assured him he would not dupe me a second time. He had received the maximum sentence of three calendar months, and I warned him to prepare to pass his days on the tread-wheel.

At mid-day I was in my office, engaged in conversation with a county magistrate, when, suddenly, the most thundering knock the outer gate had ever experienced startled the whole building from its propriety. The gate quickly opened, there entered with affected dignity a fashionably-dressed stranger, who, in the loudest tone of voice, demanded if the governor were within. The gate-warder, cap in hand, bowed with the most deferential re-



spect, and conducted the magnate to my office, where the magistrate and myself were lost in wonder, as to who the mysterious stranger could be. No sooner did the intruder catch sight of me, than, rushing with eagerness towards me, he seized my hand, and testified the utmost joy at seeing me. I could not recall his person to my memory, and told him so, when, with a manner which denoted the practised actor, he said two years had elapsed since we last had met, and a strain of flowery compliment connected with his last visit suddenly infused a suspicion as to the present errand. "Surely," I exclaimed, "you are not come to importune me for that man Hawkesworth?" That he confessed was the object of his visit, when I indignantly reproved his freedom in taking me by the hand, and quite suited my manner to my tone. "Not shake you by the hand, sir—why not? I often shake the hand of Sir Robert Peel," and while thus speaking, he seemed to swell with importance, and frown with offended dignity. "My name," he continued, "is Howard. I am a Royal Academician. I live at Cloudesley Terrace,



Hammersmith," and he ran on in a strain of boastful pretensions, which I thus interrupted, "Why, sir, you quite forget yourself; when I last saw you, you professed to be a major in the army!" "By no means," he replied; "I said the young man's *father* was a major!"

With every fresh allegation on my part, his assurance increased, and the whole scene was one combining a cool hardihood, and unblushing effrontery that none but a designing, yet clever cheat, could sustain. Inviting the magistrate to visit him at Cloudesley Terrace, he bowed stiffly to me, and promptly withdrew.

I instantly dispatched an officer, thoroughly acquainted with Hammersmith, to make the necessary inquiries, and was by no means surprised to learn that there was no such place as Cloudesley Terrace there, nor was Mr. Howard, R.A., known in that neighbourhood.

The same two scoundrels were subsequently apprehended for picking pockets at the Yacht Ball, at Cowes, and were committed for trial. Their acquaintance with legal forms and special technicalities enabled them, by writ of *habeas*, to be brought before a judge at chambers, and



there, by misrepresentation, they became admitted to bail. Although the bail was heavy, the danger of transportation was imminent, so they deemed it the safer course to forfeit their sureties, and decamp to America. They were the best dressed and most polished thieves with whom I ever came in contact, while their fictitious assumptions, and daily counterfeit personifications, endowed them with an easy tact and pliability worthy of the stage.



## CHAPTER XII.

DANGER TO LIFE IN PRISONS FROM THE VIOLENCE OF  
CRIMINALS.

THE majority of mankind entertain, I doubt not, the persuasion that those who exercise the functions of a gaol lead a life of ceaseless risk—nay, of appalling danger. I have so often had to dissipate alarms excited on this head, that I am quite aware of the extent of that nervous misgiving. Numerous were the questions on the subject of physical restraint, and the safeguards against overt rebellion, which I had to answer when before the Parliamentary Committee of 1850; and although



I made light of the suspected peril, and could not be induced gravely to entertain such apprehensions, I did not succeed in quite allaying the fears of my interrogators. I was at length compelled to declare, with emphasis, that twenty years of experience amongst assembled hosts of prisoners had so impressed me with the dangerless nature of their congregation, that I had not for years allowed my mind to speculate upon an event which I was thus tutored to regard as amongst the remotest possibilities. Indeed, although strangers might frequently behold five hundred prisoners assembled in one work-room in Cold Bath Fields, perfectly unshackled, and directed and controlled by six warders at most, a rising would be a thing the least to be expected, seeing that the enforcement of the silent system presented a safe barrier against any kind of combination.

But there is, in truth, a protection to the two or three officers placed over every one hundred convicts, which the public at large would scarcely, at the first blush, conjecture; and that protection is afforded by the willing interposition, in any emergency, of the prisoners



themselves. If any excitable man should, in a fit of irritation, rise to assail an officer (a circumstance which has proved of very rare occurrence), numerous prisoners would rush spontaneously to the rescue of the warder, and would be prepared, unless restrained by authority, to proceed to summary extremities with such an aggressor.

As an example, I had, during six months, the charge of a tall and handsome Frenchman, under thirty years of age, whose imprisonment was certainly attributable to mental aberration. He was imprisoned for felony, but there could be no question that he was incapable of self-control ; nor could we extract from him any clue to his station or relationship in France. That poor fellow insanely harboured a morbid suspicion against me. He would grin, and shake his fist at me, and mutter angry ejaculations, and, at length, he openly pronounced me to be an agent of the Jesuits, employed to persecute him. One Sunday, on going my round, I found him in his cell (which opened into the yard, occupied by one hundred prisoners), under more



than ordinary mental disturbance, and bestowing upon me a hearty malediction, he rushed from the cell, and aimed a blow at my head. Happily, it fell ineffectively ; but, reaching the top of my hat, sent it, with real pantomimic effect, spinning into the middle of the yard. In a moment six or eight strapping fellows held the assailant in their grasp. He was vigorously seized by the collar, arms, and legs, and my defenders would have inflicted upon the wretched man a serious castigation but for my commands that they should refrain from violence. The insane in general are alive to their own safety, and this poor creature thenceforth became much more forbearing towards me. His ultimate destination was a lunatic asylum.

Still, I was not destined to fulfil my arduous mission without having revealed to me the dire atrocity of which the human heart is susceptible ; and although unappeasable malice and murderous design were providentially most rare, I was doomed to know practically that such fiendish reveries do agitate and defile the soul of man. That my own escape



may be accounted miraculous, the sequel of this sad narrative will disclose ; but the assassin's knife, alas ! took sure effect in the heart of an honest, unsuspecting man, who, without a moment's note of preparation, was hurried into eternity. Few guilty men, whose crimes have been circumscribed by their lowly condition, have transcended in iniquity and cruelty George John Hewson, then my prisoner. He originally served in India as a private soldier in the 2nd or Queen's regiment. One of the prison officers had also served in the same corps, and thus we became cognizant of Hewson's history when abroad ; while from his daughter, equally a prisoner in my custody (involved in the same conviction with her father), we gathered particulars respecting him which stamped him as a matchless villain.

Hewson was a man of good stature, of comely appearance, and, when in a quiet mood, of gentle address ; but he was one of those who appeared to be cursed with 'a plague-spot in the mind.' He was always concocting mischief, and ruminating over some diabolical scheme. Abstinence from



subtle plot and evil purpose seemed with him impossible, and although he had wronged his miserable daughter beyond all earthly measure, he seemed to yearn after the sacrifice of her life, and the baseness and cruelty of his nature shone conspicuously in restless devices to compass her death.

The bygone annals of crime record the cruel murder, perpetrated years ago, of an old woman, named Donatty, who resided in Gray's-Inn Road, and the murderer has remained undiscovered to this very day. It appeared, that while Hewson was undergoing in India the punishment which, as a bad soldier, he so frequently experienced, his mind, ever active in wicked devices, suggested to him to hazard the false confession that it was he who had committed that foul murder upon the old woman. His deposition was transmitted to England, and subjected to the analysis of the police, and then its utter truthlessness became apparent, and the regiment was informed of the imposture. The hope of being despatched to England, and, by that revolting *ruse*, enabled, in the end, to



disentangle himself from military service, were the probable incitements to such a fraud, which, however, the regiment was not disposed to tolerate. Hewson was, consequently, tried by court-martial for thus despoiling the corps of his services, and was adjudged to receive two hundred lashes, which were duly inflicted.

Discharged from the army, he lived with his wife and daughter in England, when the former, exhausted by his brutal treatment, pined, and sunk into the grave. Her loss proved the ruin of her child, for, according to the daughter's averment, her abandoned father came home one night, inflamed by drink, and in spite of her earnest entreaties, he wickedly persisted in assailing her. She was, she said, constrained to silence by his savage threats, and, in touching upon that portion of her terrible narrative, the poor girl was so overcome by distress and agonizing excitement, that there was no one mark of frenzied anguish that was not discernible in that burst of misery. And no wonder, for the occasion was calculated to utterly rend her heart. Her guilty father had just revealed to me his



intention to charge her with murder, and to tender his own evidence against her. Indeed, he had already denounced her to the police; and, as I would not have her remain in ignorance of the design against her life, I communicated to her those grave proceedings, and the fearful allegations committed to writing against her. The only plea she urged in her own defence was the terror of his influence, and her firm conviction that her life would have paid the forfeit of any resistance to his will. So enslaving was the dread which his vile qualities had infused into her mind that it acted as a spell to paralyse her moral energy. "Oh! no, no," she exclaimed wildly, "there was no escape from him! He would have overrun the whole kingdom to discover me, and would never have abandoned the search until he saw me a corpse at his feet!"

The scene before us at this moment was never likely to be paralleled. The terrible history of the wretched girl; the incomparable atrocity of the father; his unheard-of malignity and cruelty in thirsting for the blood of his child; her horror, despair, indignation, and



natural alarm, all lent an intensity to her grief, which positively electrified the spectator, who could not divest his mind of the stern realities bound up in so frightful a drama. It would seem to ordinary minds that no sympathy could extend to the guilty woman who stood before us, and yet so deeply did I become impressed with her forced complicity in the crimes of her atrocious parent, that, from that moment, I felt the utmost commiseration for one so supremely unfortunate. She was to all appearance a gentle creature, and quite unequal to contend with a monster capable of any deed of darkness.

Three children were the fruit of that incestuous intercourse, all of whom were stifled at their birth. Notwithstanding his foul asseverations, I never believed that either perished by her hands. His remorseless nature sufficed to consummate the entire butchery of those unconscious babes. Both father and daughter had been tried for the murder of the last child. The charge, not sustained by evidence, had dwindled into the usual modification of 'concealing the birth,' and while the



Court adjudged him to be imprisoned for two years, she received the milder sentence of eighteen months.

Twice did he write from the prison to the city police in order to criminate his daughter, and twice did police officers visit him in the prison to hear his statements, but nothing transpired to warrant ulterior proceedings.

To me his disgusting reiteration of his daughter's guilt became intolerable, and although I sternly forbade him to repeat the subject, yet on the very morning of the fatal catastrophe, he persisted in doing so, and, incensed by his unnatural eagerness to procure his daughter's death, I indignantly ordered him to his cell, to which he retired in the most fiendish mood he had yet exhibited.

Little did we then know that Hewson had abstracted from a work-shop a pointed knife, which he had concealed and sharpened, with the deliberate intention to murder me. Our thrice daily search of every inmate, and the rigid scrutiny into every portion of the building, made the secretion of that weapon a difficulty, and, to bear it constantly about his



person an impossibility, and thus, by Heaven's mercy, was my life preserved. Although the knife was secreted in his clothes on the morning of my denunciation, he was not near enough to strike me; but, within a quarter of an hour of that scene, when the warder of his yard, an unoffending man named Woodhouse, opened the cell-door to hand him his breakfast, the villain had upraised his arm, and scrupled not to plunge the blade deep into the poor fellow's heart. His death was consequently instantaneous.

Many prisoners rose from their breakfasts, and leaping out of various sliding windows, rushed to the warder's aid. Alas! their efforts came too late, but they did seize the culprit, and deprive him of the knife. When, within a minute or two, I stood before his cell, it was frightful to witness the demoniacal rage, and to hear the yells of exultation uttered by that odious criminal. He was removed from the yard to a cell appropriately detached, where a species of sobriety supervened, and he asked for a Bible, and sat down to read it.

He expressed a keen disappointment that I



had escaped him, and made no concealment that my destruction had been his great aim. When committed to Newgate for trial, he there pleaded my tyranny towards him as the inciting cause of his desperation, and, in consequence, the sheriffs supplied the funds necessary to procure counsel for him. In the progress of the trial, my cross-examination was of a searching nature. However, the presiding judge (Parke), in addressing the jury, relieved me from all odium, by applauding my explanations and justifying my conduct. The authorities of Newgate soon had cause to know the real qualities of Hewson, whose final execution relieved them from a scourge.

At eight o'clock of the fatal day, I went down to the females' ward, anxious, concerning the condition of Matilda Hewson, whom I found deluged with tears, and agitated by uncontrollable emotion. In a quarter of an hour, the knowledge that all was now over, tended to calm that natural excitement, and she had regained perfect composure. From that moment she seemed cheerful, and even happy. An overwhelming load of misery had



been removed from her mind, and her heart seemed to bound with hopeful elasticity. Her activity and industry became remarkable, and her gentle nature daily more conspicuous.

On her discharge, Matilda Hewson was effectually befriended by some of our excellent visiting ladies ; and, changing her name, went forth under auspices superior to any she had ever yet known during her sad existence.

Within two years of the relinquishment of my prison charge, was I again providentially preserved from the deadly purpose of another assassin. A soldier of the 56th Regiment, had been tried by court-martial, for having made a murderous assault upon his sergeant, and adjudged for that offence to be transported for fourteen years. As a convict at Millbank Prison, to which he had been removed, that man still further manifested his sanguinary disposition, by attempting to take the life of a warder, upon whom he inflicted grievous injuries. Again tried for that offence, he was sentenced to endure two year's imprisonment with hard labour, at Cold Bath Fields ; and there also his murderous instinct



became once more apparent. An officer had to run for his personal safety, and always believed that his life had been imperilled on that occasion.

Alexander Goods, the villain in question, appears to have registered a vow, to glut his vengeance against society at large by depriving some individual of existence. According to his own estimate, he had never committed even a casual wrong, whereas society had pursued him with unrelenting hate and oppression. He was a young man rather astute than wanting in capacity, but one who seemed to regard deadly revenge as a religious duty.

As I could not possibly associate such a man, or furnish him, as others were provided, with a knife to cut his meat, or admit him to a participation in mechanical operations, considering his cherished scheme of vengeance against some one, no matter whom, I was compelled to allot him work in a separate cell, and to assign him space for exercise alone. He resorted to all kinds of deceptive pleas ; but at length the simulation of insanity, assumed fits of involuntary violence, and a resort to



every conceivable cunning, seemed to have been exhausted, and in their stead a somewhat extended fit of rationality supervened, and appeared to have usurped the place of senseless excesses. Goods had now, to all outward appearance, become a docile man.

In that more satisfactory mood, he, one day in May, addressed me with marked suavity, and respectfully begged I would employ him in the general works. My reply, delivered in the gentlest tone, was, that I could not possibly do so, considering the dangerous resolutions he had so openly avowed. Whereupon he exclaimed, with tartness, "Surely, I may be trusted now?" Alas! I explained to him such trust was impossible; and, manifestly exasperated, he turned away.

In the yard in which Alexander Goods exercised, was a coal cellar, which the warder had carelessly left unlocked, and there, the malignant scoundrel sought for, and found an instrument to suit his deadly intention. A square piece of granite broken for the purpose of holy-stoning the paved basements, was picked up and secreted beneath his vest. It



weighed three pounds nine ounces, and in the hands of a muscular man became a formidable missile. At the dinner hour, totally unconscious of danger, I approached his cell, the door of which opened into a narrow passage not more than three feet wide, and, so soon as I stood in the door-way, the miscreant hurled the stone at my head with terrific force. Happily the suddenness of an unusual action caused me to throw my head hastily on one side and to elevate the left shoulder, and by that simple movement my life became providentially spared. Had the stone first struck my head, instantaneous death must have ensued ; as it was, it struck the shoulder, which it frightfully contused, and slanting upwards split the ear, inflicted an incised wound behind it, and caused me to fall in a half fainting state against the wall.

An American gentleman, to whom I was showing the prison, happened to be with me, and he declared my escape from death to have been the narrowest he had ever witnessed in his life ; and he, equally with officers and prisoners extended their kindest attentions



towards me. In the midst of pain and resentment, my scarcely conscious mind derived ample gratification from the universal groan of horror and indignation that burst from the lips of nearly one hundred prisoners, who were then dining in a contiguous room. Not one of those criminal men failed thus to mark his sense of that cowardly and cruel outrage. Lawless as the lives of many of them had been, they were still men, and felt that the commonest instincts of manhood had been violated.

Brought to trial before the visiting committee, he openly declared he "intended to smash my brains, and would do it yet if he could get the opportunity," and he endured the infliction of three dozen lashes with the heavy 'cat' without uttering a cry, or moving a muscle. By the Secretary of State's order, he was soon dispatched under his original sentence, to Norfolk Island, but ere he quitted England, once more in the convict ship, he essayed to act the madman, but my report (in answer to official enquiries) speedily deprived him of all hope from that reiterated resort, and he was forced to depart.



## CHAPTER XIII.

ELECTRO-PHRENOLOGICAL EXPERIMENTS—PRISON  
OFFICERS—CLOSING DISASTERS.

IN the summer of 1852, I became cognizant of a professed science purporting to disclose a mode of defining the innate qualities of the human mind, by the conjoint agency of phrenology and electricity. I have expounded, recently, to several scientific men, both the pretensions of the experimentalist, and his *modus operandi*; and, notwithstanding my own strong conviction—the fruit of many curious disclosures—I have been assured that there cannot possibly be any genuine foundation for the truthful claims of that theory.

However, the fact that, under the sanction



of the visiting justices, upwards of one hundred examinations were taken by the professor of that science, at Cold Bath Fields, and about sixty at Tothill Fields Prisons, and that I was constrained to repose confidence in the observations taken under my own eye, in consequence of the marvellous expositions of character and qualities previously known to me, but hidden from the professor until revealed to him by his art, may well justify me in recording the history of those rare experiments.

My attention was first invited to this novel subject by Mr. Trevethan Spicer, a barrister, who seemed to delight in the elucidation of abstruse problems; and that gentleman solicited my consent to the introduction to me of Monsieur Leger, a member of the Medical Institute of Paris, who, he affirmed, was desirous to be armed with authority to prosecute his electric tests upon the extended mass of criminal material within the sphere of my jurisdiction. Mr. Spicer proceeded to describe the instrument which Monsieur Leger designated the 'magnetoscope,' and he suggested



an early day for the Frenchman's visit to me.

Having on previous occasions conferred with Mr. Spicer, I could not, without discourtesy, reject his proposition; although I had listened to him with signal incredulity, and was internally annoyed by such prospective waste of time, as I devoutly believed the experiments would prove to be. However, I gave my assent, and ere long Monsieur Leger and his magnetoscope were ushered into the prison, under the guidance of Mr. Spicer. At the moment of their arrival, I was deeply engaged, and experienced a cordial satisfaction in tendering an excuse which I then hoped, would rid me of any farther importunity for such an interview.

Not so, however, for I found the instrument had been deposited in my office, with an intimation that in two hours' time the gentlemen would return, under the hope of finding me more at leisure. Consequently, as I could perceive no means of extrication, I resigned myself to the prospect of a tiresome consumption of both my time and patience. I am



thus minute in the disclaimer of a voluntary co-operation in the projected analyses, in order the more strongly to mark my after acknowledgment of the surpassing efficacy of those electro-phrenological tests, by whatever means they were elaborated.

I found Monsieur Leger to be a gentleman of quick intelligence, frank and manly address, good education, and seemingly about fifty years of age. He had published a pamphlet explanatory of his system, which he had, by permission, dedicated to Sir David Brewster: and, moreover, he quoted various eminent men, whom he affirmed to have given their countenance to his theory, and amongst them he pronounced the acquiescence of Lord Rosse in the plausibility of his demonstrations.

Dr. Leger did not lay claim to the invention of the magnetoscope, but openly ascribed it to Mr. Rutter, of Brighton, by whom it had been originally designed to test the quality of metals. A succession of experiments, in Paris, had assured Monsieur Leger, as he averred, that the instrument could be made available in pathological demonstrations, and, at length,



numerous observations led him to confide in its power to delineate the extent and character of the mental organs. Monsieur Leger spoke English fluently, and had come to London expressly to advance his interests by this new illustration of phrenology. When signing his name he invariably added to it M.D.

The magnetoscope, surmounted by a conical glass shade, was about eighteen inches high; its base was circular, closely imitative of the compass, the points E. W. N. S., being equally defined upon it. Some six or eight linear circles, equidistant, and variously coloured, denoted numbers, as the experiment proceeded.

At the apex of the glass shade, was a small hole, through which depended a diminutive cone of sealing-wax (highly electric in its property, as Monsier Leger affirmed), attached to a single horse-hair, which was made fast at the top to a porcupine's quill, horizontally disposed; while the glass shade, at about two inches from its apex, was begirt with a polished brass fixture extruding from the glass with a flat surface of about half an inch. Upon



that projecting circle, during the experiment, a finger of the left hand rested, while with the right hand the phrenological bosses were manipulated. I am so unused to deal with scientific data, that I can only hope I convey some intelligible notion of the instrument in its form and applicability.

Monsieur Leger first proposed to convince me of its efficacious property, by the development of my own character, and, certainly, he did proclaim unerringly the salient peculiarities of my organization, some of which the extended rule of that huge prison had rendered sufficiently distinguishable, and which I could not fail to recognize in the delineation traced out by Monsieur Leger.

He had rightly judged that that portraiture would dispose me more readily to confide in its truthfulness, and would kindle in my mind a willingness to further his project. I did not hesitate to submit Monsieur Leger's proposition to the consideration of the visiting committee, and it found favour there upon the principle that, at least, no possible mischief was likely to accrue from such a harmless phrenological investigation.



Thus authorized, Monsieur Leger entered upon his task, and received from my hands any subjects whose mental qualities I might feel inclined to penetrate. He sought not to derive from me a forecast of their characters, but was rather desirous that I should withhold any clue to their unravelment, and leave him by the science which he manifestly confided, to work out results which might subsequently be compared with the evidences derivable from previous conversation and demeanour.

Scarcely an examination was entered upon in my absence, and nothing analogous to deceptive contrivance was discernible, for I heard every communication between the parties. The person examined was required to sit down within a few feet of the magnetoscope. Monsieur Leger was the conductor from the cranium to the instrument, and as he manipulated with his left-hand finger resting on the brass girdle, as I have described, the cone of sealing-wax became more or less agitated, according to the strength or weakness of the faculty then tested. By the momentum the experimentalist computed the extent of the



quality, which he denoted by figures, and ultimately resolved the entire character by the contemplation of all the faculties developed. Here, I must explain that Monsieur Leger communicated, for a fee, the mode of operation to others, and professed to sell the magnetoscope; so that any one versed in phrenology, was capable of exercising the art equally with himself. Everything, in short, appeared to be fair, open, and devoid of false pretence.

The results were so magical, that my judgment was led captive, all latent scepticism vanished, and I was compelled, by irrefragable proofs and disclosures, to place reliance in these astonishing tests, however elicited.

My preceding narrative will have exemplified the countless strange characters and qualities by which I was surrounded, and will manifest that there could be no lack of appropriate subjects upon whom to experimentalize. I did my best in the selection to produce such as were most noticeable, and in no one instance did Monsieur Leger's report belie my foreknowledge concerning them.

I could cite numerous remarkable cases



confirmatory of that assertion, but shall content myself with a few only. A well-educated man, who had been secretary to a public company, had, by deep subtlety, largely defrauded his employers, who had, moreover, discovered so many wiles practised in other quarters by that man, that his antecedents proclaimed him to be a consummate rogue. Still, adhering to his habit of deception, he had assailed our credulity, when, lo ! his real disposition was laid bare before me, and I became cognizant of his bygone knavery. From the moment he was made aware that I knew his history, he became circumspect, and had lapsed into forced steadiness when I submitted him to the manipulations of Monsieur Leger. Not a word was spoken during the examination, which I watched with impatient interest. The examination completed, he withdrew, when Leger exclaimed—"What a character ! That fellow does not possess one grain of conscience. He is capable of any amount of fraud and trickery !" And then, but not till then, I revealed to Leger the man's long proved chicanery, so fully according with the revelations fresh from the magnetoscope.



In like manner was my estimate confirmed of the qualities of the bigoted and bigamist 'Monk of La Trappe,' whose characteristics I have previously sketched.

Again : a young fellow who had embraced the calling of a thief was found to be unusually ferocious and combative. Birmingham had become to him a place of unsafe residence, and, flying thence, he had been practising theft—principally picking pockets—at the Great Western Terminus, Paddington, when detection followed. His apprehension evoked the habitual brutality of his nature, and the resistance he offered was stubborn but vain. He was captured, and committed to the House of Detention under the name of Jones. There his violence necessitated the use, rarely resorted to, of irons ; but, at length, he stood at the bar of the Middlesex sessions, and heard the doom of transportation pronounced upon him by the late Mr. Sergeant Adams. His pugnacious spirit had caused him to make provision for that extremity ; and, in order to avenge it, he had concealed in his pocket a small stone ink-bottle, which he hurled—



happily without effect—at the head of the Assistant-Judge. Under that conviction, Jones was removed to my custody, where, admonished of the severe chastisement he would incur if he should resort to further violence, he became, wisely, pacific. Now, Monsieur Leger was utterly ignorant of those preceding events when I submitted this young man to his examination.

Not the slightest communication had taken place between the manipulator and the officers, and nothing had transpired to throw any light, however transient, upon the case. Again I watched the experiment with much interest, when, lo ! the judgment pronounced was that ‘destructiveness and combativeness’ were most inordinately developed, and that there was an utter absence of ‘consciousness.’ “That young fellow,” said Monsieur Leger, “is quite equal to the commission of murder. He is a shocking subject !”

I had at that time charge of two supremely vicious characters—one of them a German, whom I will not further designate. The examination of those two reprobates separately, and



at the interval of some days, and without the remotest hint concerning their crime, produced a report from Monsieur Leger so fraught with special descriptiveness of their abandonment, that I was perfectly electrified by conclusions so astounding, and yet so just. My reliance upon the remarkable tests now became complete, and my own conviction was strengthened by the following confirmatory testimony.

While Monsieur Leger was thus pursuing his experiments, I received a visit from Mr. Wilberforce, a county magistrate, whose first inquiry was as to the authority under which they were made. Satisfied, and I may also say gratified by my assurance upon that head, he next anxiously sought to learn my opinion of the tests I had witnessed, and I unhesitatingly declared my full trust in the fidelity of the science. Thereupon, Mr. Wilberforce expressed his entire concurrence in my views, and proceeded to describe the examinations made, at his instance, and in his own house by Monsieur Leger, upon a party of eminent men who were strangers to that gentleman. They had been invited by Mr. Wilberforce for the purpose,



ignorant, however, of his object. The matter appeared to be casually introduced by himself—the magnetoscope was brought in, and the examinations proceeded. I forbear to publish the names detailed to me by Mr. Wilberforce, as I have no warrantry for doing so; but shall confine myself to the declaration that they were men of public reputation. Monsieur Leger's delineation of each character filled them all with astonishment, and Mr. Wilberforce appeared to repose unqualified faith in the value of this marvellous agency.

Monsieur Leger was permitted to make select examinations upon some of the insane at the Lunatic Asylum at Colney Hatch, and he was busy in arranging all the matters he had collected, for publication, with a view to illustrate the full import of the science, when his labours were cut short by severe illness, which, after weeks of suffering, terminated in his death.

I have since had no opportunity of learning if any other person is still pursuing these experiments, which, in the loss of their zealous



professor, seem to have become suspended, or perhaps extinguished.

I profess not the requisite knowledge either to affirm or to deny their affinity with electric science, and although, as I have already said, several men, whose dicta are entitled to weight, have denied to me their connection with electrical phenomena, I am not the less staggered by the conclusions I have related, or at a loss to account for the singularly truthful development of human minds, whose aberrations I had scrutinized with an interest inseparable from the zealous exercise of my vocation.

I cannot conclude my prison reminiscences without making some observations upon the subordinate functionaries. The public can be scarcely aware of the lengthened services of many of the prison officers, or of the patience, the temper, and humanity with which those admirable men would perform their ungenial duties. Honest, firm, and faithful, most of those exemplary persons would display the best and noblest qualities of the human heart. The pure administration of prison government had as much tended to elevate the characters



of its subordinate officers, as the ancient misrule and connivance at abuses had wrought their degradation.

Within a few months of my retirement from Cold Bath Fields, the number of warders and sub-warders, with the periods of their service, stood as follows, viz.—

|                                                |    |
|------------------------------------------------|----|
| Officers who had served upwards of 14 years... | 9  |
| „ „ „ 12 „ ...                                 | 11 |
| „ „ „ 10 „ ...                                 | 5  |
| „ „ „ 7 „ ...                                  | 19 |
| „ „ „ 5 „ ...                                  | 21 |

I then put the above statement publicly forth to the magistrates, as a fair inference that my rule of them had been at least gentle and considerate. When Mr. Rotch, as I have narrated, sowed the seeds of disorder and dissension, by the absurd agitation in behalf of teetotalism, the defections from my views and interests were few. The great majority proved staunch adherents to their old governor, and exhibited the most manly qualities, nor is it possible that I can adequately declare how much I was touched by their fidelity. Again, at the close of my official career, when I was assailed



by vituperative slander, at least 100 out of 107 subordinates sympathized with me, and testified their sorrow at beholding me aspersed.

These good men lead a life little short of imprisonment. Doing duty during twelve hours of the day, with the interval of an hour for dinner, and, in frequent rotation, performing night duty also, they are required to exercise ceaseless vigilance, to restrain impetuosity of temper, and to exercise care and humanity. Surely such men dearly earn their stipends, and merit the utmost consideration from the magistrates. False economists have raised a cry against their remuneration, and have succeeded in unduly diminishing the wages of the newly employed. In my heart I always deprecated such penurious sentiments; for, as those men labour long and painfully, they merit ample recompense.

I have witnessed in that prison some strange reverses of fortune in the nominations to such lowly offices. At the period of my appointment, in 1829, I found there a man, occupying the post of 'turnkey,' who had been a provincial banker. He proved corrupt, and



was discharged. Shortly after his dismissal, a young man became a turnkey from the position of mate in the royal navy. He displayed intemperate habits, and was, consequently, expelled. Next, we beheld, in that humble capacity, one who had been a lieutenant in the Life Guards. He was a most gentle and worthy creature, who had been reduced to ruin by a chancery suit in the 'good old times' of doubt and procrastination. He remained as a prison officer two years, at the end of which time, his altered position and unsuitable functions so preyed upon his mind, that he was compelled to resign, although nought but beggary confronted him; and we raised a general subscription to redeem him from absolute want. I last heard of him as clerk in an office, with a reputable salary, and he told me he was happy.

Another man, of very opposite character, had been a lieutenant in the Blues. His extravagance induced his father to 'cut him off with a shilling,' and his impaired vision proving fatal to his efficiency as a prison officer, he was forced to retire. I am grieved



to record that his after career, was discreditable.

On the female side of the prison we had to deplore the like decline in worldly circumstances. One poor woman, who filled the post of 'turnkey,' had, when married, brought her husband a dowry of £8,000. She was a worthy and most intelligent woman, and had a heart surcharged with humanity. Others, in their degree, had suffered adversity; but whether on the males' or females' side, we failed not to notice superior aptitude, and, on fitting occasions, to commend them to distant authorities, and thus many of our officers were advanced to posts of trust, endowed with suitable emolument, and in no one instance did they fail to justify our recommendations.

A painful fatality seemed to hover over the prison office. Shortly after my appointment, the clerk became of unsound mind, and his removal to a lunatic asylum ensued as a matter of stern necessity. His aged father, a bankrupt stock-broker, succeeded him, and struggled on with physical incapacity. His assistant, a model clerk, obtained a better appointment



elsewhere, and I thus lost my right-hand man. A fresh election ensued, and the choice fell upon a reduced merchant—a gentleman of faultless character and unsullied honour, but whose shortness of sight, and slow mode of writing, rendered all his unwearied application inadequate to the mass of business that encompassed him, and defied his unflagging but vain endeavours.

His indispensable retirement brings me to a portion of the prison administration which I would willingly pass by in silence. The candid exposition of my own short comings impels me, however reluctantly, to record a train of circumstances which clouded my closing services. A young clerk, who shall be nameless, the son of reputable parents, from whom he had received the best example, was, in an evil hour, elevated to the post of chief accountant. An adept in figures, even beyond his years, he proceeded to relieve his individual embarrassments, somehow contracted, by the diversion to his own use of the county funds, at length, to a serious amount.

The governor was required to supervise his



books and accounts ; and, fully confiding in his probity—nay, utterly unsuspecting of aught amiss—I did so cursorily, and with perfect reliance upon his correctness. Alas ! ulterior disclosures demonstrated how weak and inadequate had been the checks thus interposed. His flight and a fearful defalcation entailed upon me a vast amount of public wrath ; and gratuitous malvolence caused insidious whispers to circulate, which sought to fasten upon me a complicity in this dire deficiency. My own heart and conscience arming me with honest resolution, I confronted the storm of censure and of odium, and invoked the most searching inquiry. It was instituted by directions from the Home Office ; and the Inspector of Prisons, Captain Williams, aided the visiting justices in an investigation which consumed many days. Public accountants, and a short-hand writer extended their respective co-operation, and the voluminous evidence bearing upon that subject, as also upon collateral points connected with my administration, was printed and circulated amongst the magistracy at large.



I am far from desirous to shield myself from the censure and reproach to which I was justly liable ; but still I had to advance some valid grounds of defence, and addressed my justification to the magistrates, under date the 16th February, 1854. I had good right to plead that the rule of 1594 prisoners, and about 110 officers, constituted an appalling charge, such, indeed, as few men could be found equal to encounter. The endless references. correspondence, and minute details, would appear sufficiently onerous, and leave me but little leisure to analyze complicated accounts. Moreover, the blow inflicted upon me by the prisoner, Alexander Goods, had produced a concussion which had grievously disturbed my mind. Whatever may have been the amount of blame deemed to attach to me, I was still gratified to learn, at the termination of the inquiry, that nothing had transpired to impeach my honour or integrity. That conclusion I full well knew ought to prevail, but it is not always that our own consciousness is plainly communicable to others.

To be candid, however, as I have assumed



much credit for my early vigorous reform of the prison, and for my disciplinary aptitude, I am bound honestly to admit my liability to censure. Neither I, nor any other principal—either in a public charge, or in a mercantile or trading concern—ought to be satisfied with a superficial check. The courtesy of reliance, and the blindness of confidence, are false and misplaced.

I have not sufficient trust in my own arithmetical proficiency, to persuade myself that I could have suggested a competent restraint upon a man entrusted with large receipts of money under multifarious heads. Still, I ought to have sought elsewhere for the requisite instruction, and I was culpable for neglecting to do so.

It may have been that there was remissness in other quarters, but no suspicion lurked in any mind. There existed unquestionably some laxity in the organization of the office. To say that I grieved over this ill-omened discovery, is to employ very feeble language; it caused me the most intense anguish, and I nearly sunk under a complication of trials,—



I hardly expected to survive them. Hourly doubtful of another day's existence, I became convinced that if my life or intellect were to be preserved, I must retire from that arduous post, which I had no longer the strength or equanimity to fill.

I can never cease to appreciate the surpassing kindness of Captain Williams, the prison inspector, in that emergency. He proved as considerate and benevolent as he is intellectual and eminent in the exercise of his office. The good feeling and magnanimity of the magistracy, was again exercised in my behalf, and to some individuals of that body, I can never repay my obligations at that crisis.

I retired with a pension at Christmas 1854, and had the honour and gratification, at my last presence in the court, to receive the following testimonial, publicly voted by a full bench, with the most flattering unanimity. It was inscribed on vellum, presented to me, and is thus expressed :—

“Resolved, that the court cannot take leave of Mr. Chesterton without expressing their sense of the services which he has rendered to



the county in the discharge of the duties of the office of Governor of the House of Correction for the term of twenty-five years, during which they have witnessed the zeal and ability with which every measure of prison discipline has been carried into effect, both for the benefit of the prison, and advantage of the county, and they trust, in the retirement which he now seeks from his office, he will find that renewal of his health and strength so much required after many years of unceasing exertion."

Here, therefore, was not only a flattering recognition of my extended services, but at the same time a generous oblivion cast over my closing defects, which I deem but due to the county unaffectedly to acknowledge.

Before concluding this narrative, I desire to repair an omission. It may prove interesting to state, that we were much perplexed by the comparative large proportion of imprisoned foreigners—many of whom exhibited strange and intractable dispositions. For some years past they averaged forty, Germans preponderating. French, Spaniards, Italians, South-Americans,



Lascars, and even Chinese became also interspersed amongst our inmates. We were twice compelled to whip an ultra-malignant Lascar, who was by such means only coerced into gentle observances. A tall, and very handsome Italian, named Primecerio, who was said to have been a brigand in his own country, was also visited with the lash, as the sole means of reducing him to conformity with any rules whatsoever. The obstinacy of that man was most incorrigible, while his effrontery was boundless. After tormenting me almost beyond human endurance, during an incarceration of one year, he coolly wrote to me from Paris, to transmit to him, 'by return of post,' a sum of money. A Swiss reprobate, who was a compound of subtlety and hardihood, had the assurance to tell me, one day, that no other European people would submit to our stringent discipline, adding, with a tone and look expressive of supreme contempt—*"Mais les Anglais sont si lâches!"* We were seldom without a few North Americans, but they were usually civil and tractable.

In a statistical point of view, the aspect of



crime in the metropolitan county is most favourable. Notwithstanding the increase of population, the extension of buildings, the vigilance of a numerous police force, and the enlarged jurisdiction conferred by the Police and other Acts of Parliament upon police magistrates—the committals to prison in latter years have greatly diminished. In the year 1832, the committals to Cold Bath Fields, only, amounted to 12,543. Since that period, the diminution may be computed by thousands. With that gratifying fact I close these pages, once more inviting the legislature to look for the perfection of secondary punishments within the compass of our own kingdom.

THE END.



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